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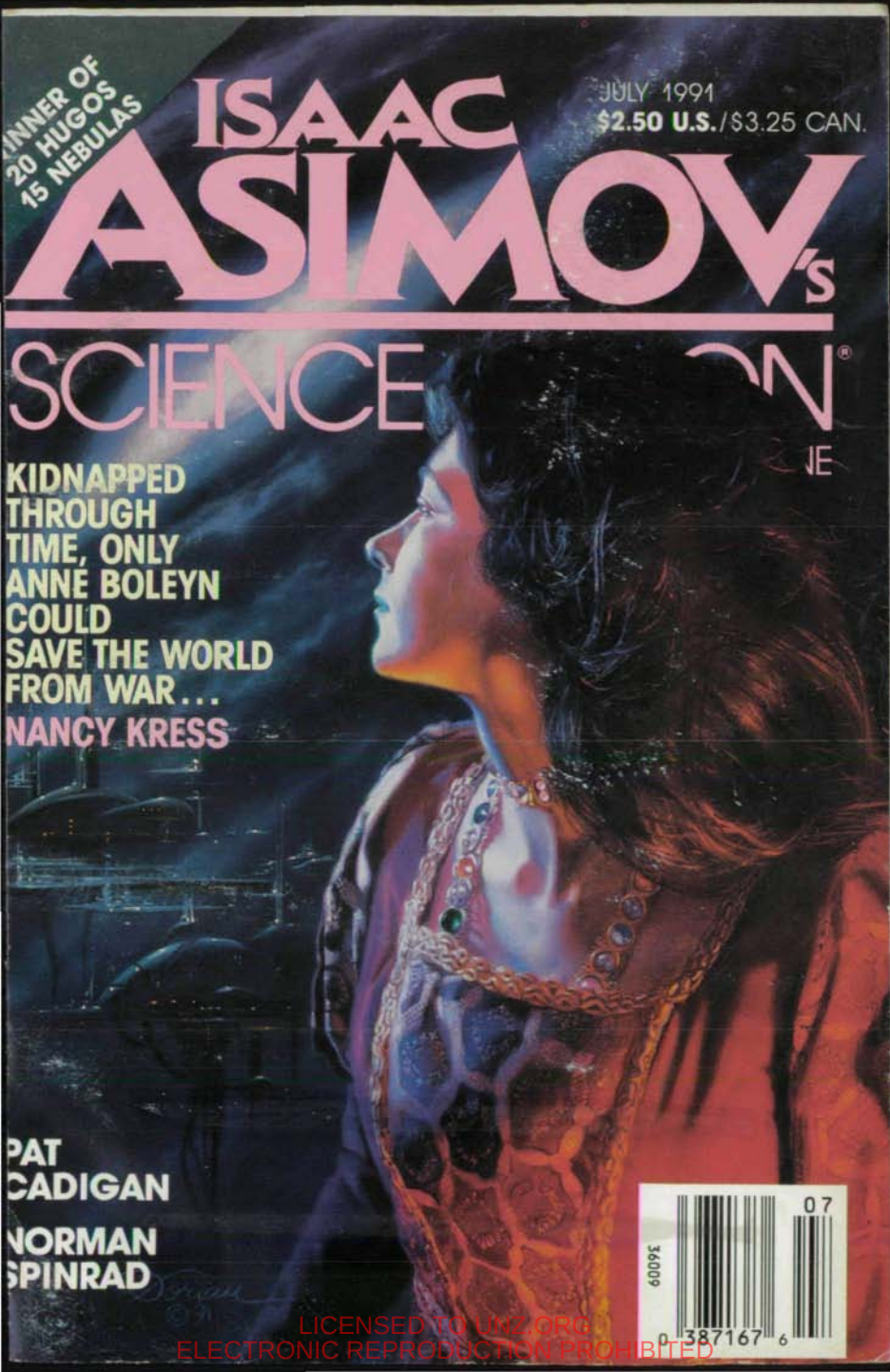

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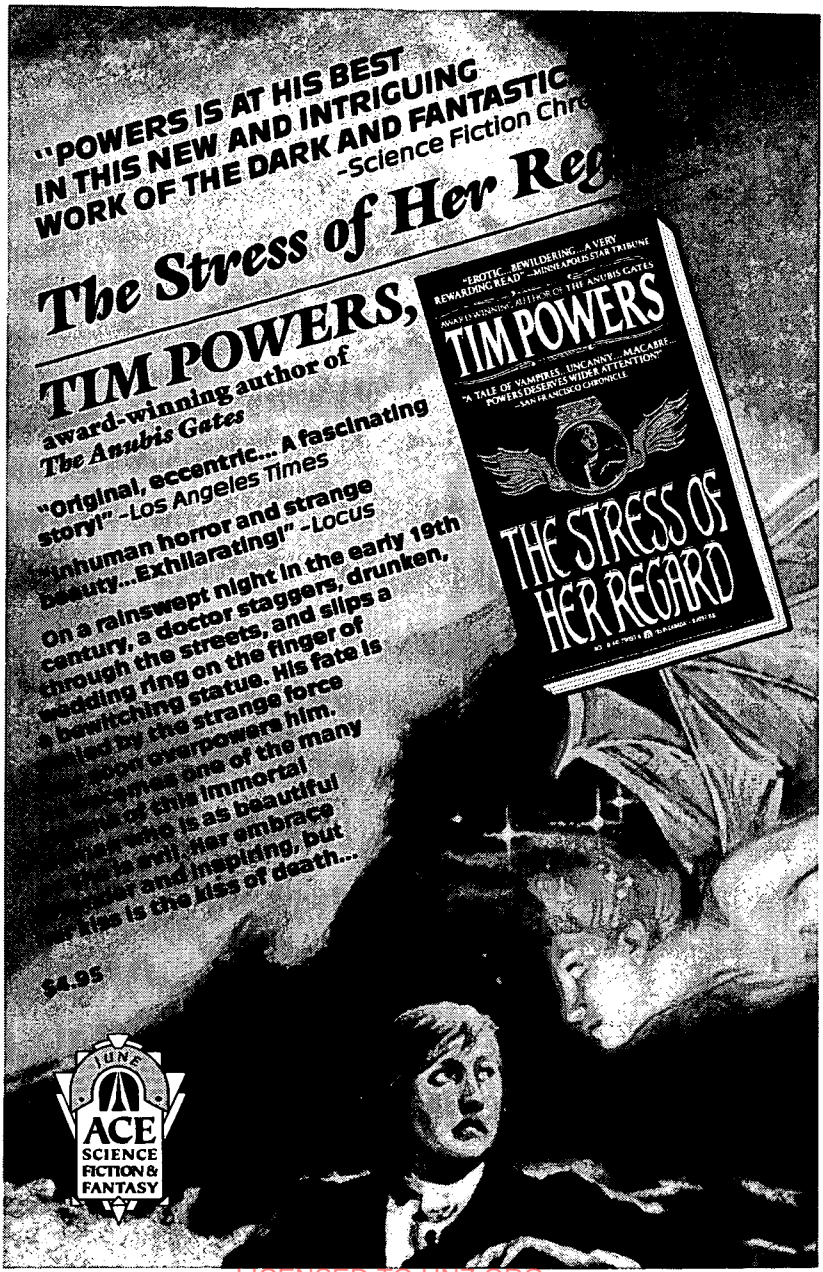
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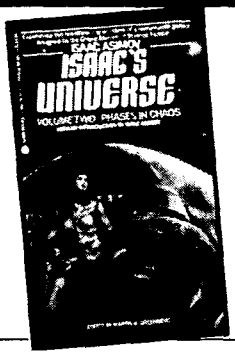

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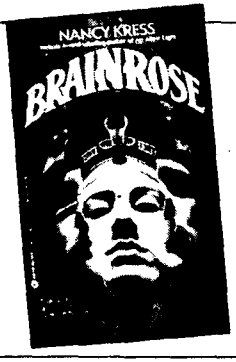

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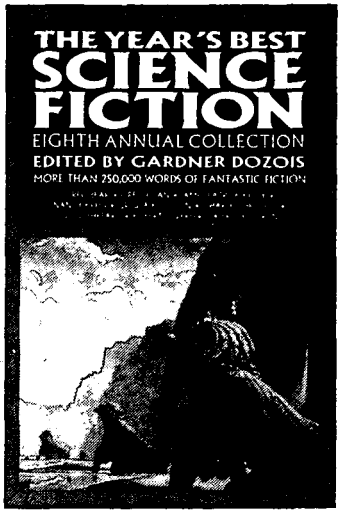

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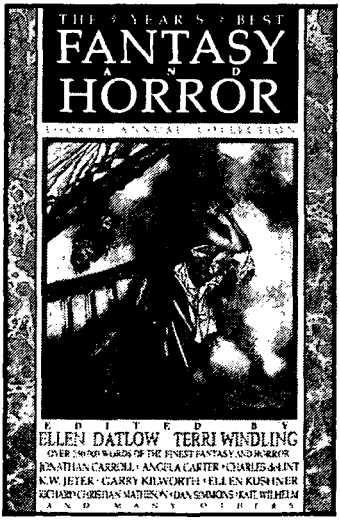
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July 1991
Next issue on sale
June 25, 1991

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EDITORIAL

by Isaac Asimov

DISAGREEMENTS

Naturally, when one deliberately writes editorials that are controversial, as I do, because I like to say what I think, I expect to get letters from people who like to say what *they* think and who disagree with me strenuously. I would like to have those letters printed because I am a firm believer in free speech and don't feel I have the sole right to my soap-box. Unfortunately, indignation runs away with such readers sometimes and leads them to write letters that are treatises rather than letters. There's just no room to print them, so please, everyone, say what you have to say *concisely* and we will try to accommodate as many of you as possible.

Meanwhile, I have three letters (long, long letters, alas) disagreeing with each of three of my statements. One of them takes up my remarks in *Grumbles of My Own* in the September 1990 issue, and takes issue with my remarks on overpopulation.

My correspondent, a Texan, is perfectly willing to admit that cities such as New York, Tokyo, Beijing, London, Paris, Moscow, Damascus, Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, Cairo, and Calcutta are overpopulated. He says, "It would not surprise me if a billion of the few billion people of earth were already crammed into fifteen or twenty major cities of this planet. And, so, who's going to listen to the other few billion who ask, 'What overpopulation? It's not crowded where we live.' "

What an argument! I really thought no one would ever pull the old bromide to the effect that "the leak is on the other side of the boat, and there's no leak at this end, so we're all right." Apparently, though, people do.

Look! The Earth's population is 5.2 billion now; and it was only 1.9 billion when I was born. It doesn't matter where the 5.2 billion are located. They all eat. They all use energy. They all produce waste. The food and energy must be supplied and the waste must be stashed away. The air that is fouled and the water that is poisoned by the crowded cities make their way into Texas, too. The roads that must service the enormous population must crisscross all the world and the automobiles and other machinery of modern life must be every-

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where. All you "un-crowded" sections are not safe. Don't fool yourself into thinking you are.

I was on a radio talk show recently and mentioned that the 1990 census placed the population of the United States at 250 million. "Oh," said the woman I was talking to, "that doesn't matter. *We* aren't where the overpopulation is."

"Yes we are, madam," I said. "Our 250 million use more of the earth's resources and produce more of the Earth's waste than all 1600 million Chinese and Indians put together. Every American crowds the Earth ten times as much as almost any non-American does."

Why don't people *think?*

Another correspondent takes issue with my concern about the environment, which I expressed in the answer to a letter on the safety of nuclear power. He seems to think that environmentalists are part of a "lunatic fringe." (His words.)

He says, "it was your comments on the greenhouse effect that surprised me. Any true scientist knows that the greenhouse effect is the reason we are able to live on this planet. Were it not for the warming effect caused by *all* of the gases in the atmosphere, this earth would be too cold to support life."

Apparently, this correspondent cares nothing about the matter of dosage. Of course the Earth exhibits a greenhouse effect that keeps its average temperature at 14 C. (night-day, winter-summer, and arctic-tropic differences are

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smoothed out.) But does that mean that we want to increase the greenhouse effect to bring the average temperature to 16 C.? That small a difference will melt the ice-caps and put the continental coastlines under 200 feet of water.

Because enough is good, we cannot argue that too much is better. No one who likes his steak medium wants it charred. No one who likes his beer cold wants it frozen. No one who likes their cake moist wants it to be dripping wet.

Is this so hard to understand?

My correspondent goes on to say that "recent computer surveys of the average temperatures of the earth for the last hundred years have shown that in spite of the buildup of CO_2 and other pollutants, there has not been one single degree increase in the average temperature!" He's dreaming. The buildup has been greatest in the last twenty years and the last few years have been the warmest on record in recent times.

He also points out that we need not worry about ozone because it is an unstable molecule that breaks down spontaneously to oxygen. Yes, it does, but the sun's ultra-violet forms it again. The danger is that we are introducing chemicals that break it down *faster* than it can be regenerated. This is apparently too difficult a concept for my correspondent.

My correspondent is also concerned that too much worry about the environment will lead to an erosion of our "liberties." If he means the liberty to breathe polluted air and drink poison water, to be exposed to toxic chemicals and man-made radiation, then I must remind him that liberty is not absolute. He does *not* have the "liberty" to kill anyone he dislikes, nor to abuse a child if that amuses him. And none of us should have the "liberty" to destroy the environment that is home for all of us. If that be treason, make the most of it.

That brings me to my third correspondent, whose objections are less cosmic but who is angriest of all. He objects to my editorial "Sharing Universes," which appeared in the August 1990 issue.

He remarks very sarcastically that I might have written stories about E. E. Smith's "Skylark" universe instead of writing my own stories like "Nightfall," the robot stories and the Foundation stories, and made more money that way.

Yes, I might have, but I didn't, largely because I didn't think I was a good enough writer for that, and not because of any ethical objections I might have had. As a matter of fact, John Campbell wrote unabashed E. E. Smith imitations and made a good thing out of it. Then after Stanley G. Weinbaum wrote "A Martian Odyssey" in 1934, Henry Kuttner and Arthur K. Barnes (and others) did Weinbaum imitations over and over. They didn't actually use the older universes exactly, but they might just as well have done so. The differences were trivial.

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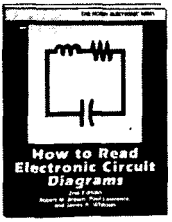

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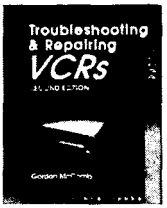

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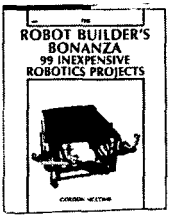

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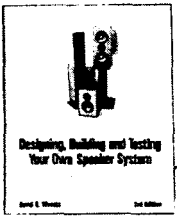

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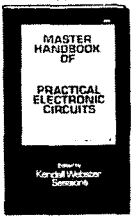

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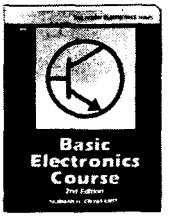

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If my correspondent thinks sharing universes is a modern phenomenon, he is quite wrong. And, as a matter of fact, in my early stories I did my level best to imitate such masters as Clifford Simak and Robert Heinlein, and even my Foundation stories were open attempts to enter the Gibbon universe. I made no secret about it. The mystery stories I have written during the last twenty years are imitations of Agatha Christie. My George and Azazel stories are imitations of P. G. Wodehouse. I make no secret about that, either. No, I don't use the universes I imitate *exactly,* but again the differences are trivial.

Is there something wrong with this? Is it wrong for me to try to imitate writers I admire, when in each case I put an Asimovian slant on the matter? Was it wrong for Vergil and for Milton to use Homer as their models in writing their epics?

My correspondent uses the word "hack" freely to describe those writers who make use of the universes of other people. He says "hack writing is scribbling words that are not important to the writer, writing done without love, churning out the pages just for the money or to have one's name in print."

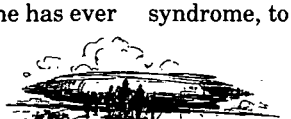
I'll accept that description of "hack." After all, he describes it not as writing a great deal, but as writing without love. Now I write a great deal; hardly anyone has ever written more; but my worst enemies could not for one moment accuse me of writing without love, and no one could seriously call me a hack writer.

But what makes my correspondent so sure that writers who deal with the universes of others do so without love. What makes him so ready to call them "hacks?" I don't believe for one moment that that is what they are. To write "just for money" is the hardest work I can imagine and a writer must *really* be hard-up to have to do that; and he will probably be driven to drink by it, too.

Let me tell you that Robert Silverberg and I discussed his expansion of "Nightfall" and he told me (and I believe him) that he was excited and delighted at a chance to work on a story that he had loved as a youngster and that had haunted him all his years as a science fiction writer.

I imagine that those people who write "Star Trek" novels love the "Star Trek" universe and consider it a privilege and honor to write about the characters which, to them, are so beloved. My dear wife, Janet, reads *all* the Star Trek novelizations precisely because she loves the characters so. I imagine she could think of nothing so pleasant as to write one herself if she felt she could do a good enough job.

So I ask all of you who get infuriated over the shared-universe syndrome, to lighten up. ●



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LETTERS

Dear Editors:
I had always wanted to write and express my pleasure with the excellent art work *IAsfm* uses, but . . . something happened not long ago.

It was with sadness I noted the recent death of Ed Emshwiller, known to SF fans as Emsh. Emsh and Kelly Freas dominated the covers and interiors of almost all the science fiction magazines of the 1950s.

When we talk about John Campbell we usually note his vision of science fiction as a literature of ideas, but we all know that one of the remarkable attributes of the prose he demanded, besides good writing, was an idea about how to make super science tenable. In the 40s and 50s much of SF was dominated by "future fiction," which Campbell and his writers imbued with a texture. The texture of a certain domestication. How more exciting interstellar travel was if it had a lived-in-look demeanor. Golden age SF prose converged quickly on this insight of Campbell.

It is little remarked upon, but soon, too, there were artists like Hurburt Rodgers and Edd Cartier filling the covers and interiors of *ASF* with wonderful art that captured this spirit. Then Kelly Freas and Ed Emshwiller began illustrating for the even more refined SF prose of the 50s. What most impressed me about this work was their attention to costume, equipment, architecture, and vehicles. Art work where super science made a connection with everyday life in future time.

But. . . , more than that. There is a certain kinetic feeling, a life-like juncture to the action in the stories. Realization, to my mind's eye, of the story action.

I point to the Emsh cover and interior illos for Alfred Bester's astonishing novel *The Stars My Destination* serialized in *Galaxy* magazine (1956). How to capture Bester's Wide Screen Baroque and still make it look "lived in," you just have to look to see Ed Emshwiller's marvelous talent. (One always wondered who the beautiful lady in his works was. When I met her I realized the model was his wife, short story writer Carol Emshwiller.)

Brian Aldiss, in his book *Science Fiction Art,* wrote, "Emsh is the great all-rounder of sf art. A well-chosen folio of his drawings would be a thing to treasure." Alas! No such collection of his work exists. Someone should take note.

Al Jackson
Houston, TX

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Thank you. Our readers often praise this writer or that, but a tribute to science fiction art, and particularly to Ed Emsh does not *come our way often.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editor.

With your indulgence I'd like to respond to reader George Wares's letter in your September 1990 issue. Mr. Wares's letter was basically a defense of the writer J.G. Ballard and referred to earlier letters by myself and another reader named Theodore Reed.

While it is true that I don't care much for the writings of J.G. Ballard, I admit that my words of criticism were somewhat ill chosen. I'd rather say that I dislike self-consciously artistic work than say that I have "contempt for the deliberately obscure artist." I'm not exactly sure what I meant by that.

That was just an off hand remark. The whole purpose of my letter was not to criticize J.G. Ballard, but simply to praise the writing style of Isaac Asimov. True, I find Ballard boring. But then my tastes in literature may serve more to judge me than any writer.

Anyway, George, your comments are well taken. My thanks to *IAsfm* for allowing me to clarify my position.

Gary Fletcher,
Port Coquitlam, B.C.
Canada

Oh, well, we all have our different ways of doing things and which is "right" and which "wrong" is often a matter of very subjective judgment. After all, it is possible to argue that I write clearly because I'm too dumb to know how to write obscurely.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Asimov,

Your readers all know that the stories in your magazine frequently present journeys into the trackless wastes of the farthest reaches of the universe, but they may not know into what forbidding and exotic climes on the planet Earth your periodical itself travels.

In May of this year, a group of four of us skied and climbed our way for two hundred kilometers across the icefields of the Coast Mountains in British Columbia. Included within the compass of our trek were the Tchakistan, Monmouth, Chapman, Edmond, Frank Smith, Stanley Smith, Ring, Lillooet, Dalgleish, and Manatee Glaciers. We were in good company, however. Along with us we had four issues of *IAsfm,* with which we whiled away several tentbound days of whiteout and blizzard. I only wish I had thought to take a picture for you of the group of us stuffed into our sleeping bags with our several noses stuffed into copies of your magazine.

I think each of us read each issue at least twice. Our favorite story, incidentally, was Joe Haldeman's "The Hemingway Hoax."

Thanks for helping make our expedition a great success.

Rick Collier
Calgary, AB
Canada

I wish you had taken the photo; I would have tried to argue Gardner

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into publishing it. We have a photo of Arthur C. Clarke (whoever he might be) reading the magazine and I'm trying to get Gardner to publish that.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Isaac Asimov:

It seems as though I've been reading your tales since you started writing them. And my Dad before me was a Science Fiction Fan. (I wish I had all HIS old magazines! The old *Amazing* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories!*) They'd be worth a Mint, now!!!

Anyway, I recently came into possession of a book, *Science Fiction of the Forties*. I think it is a rare treasure! With stories by yourself, James Blish, Ray Bradbury, Robert A. Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke, Clifford Simak, A.E. Van Vogt, et. al. I am not NECESSARILY interested in selling it, but how would YOU rate its value?

The cover is a reprint from the December 1940 issue of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*. *The Science Fiction of the Forties* is an original publication of Avon Books. According to its masthead, none of the works in it have previously appeared in book form. Some of these stories are real heart-string strummers. A few BEMS, but mostly an amazing collection of GOOD, intellectual SF.

I would be pleased with your assessment of its worth. Somehow I have the feeling that it is a true classic, dumped into the Flea-Market by a non-science-fiction fan!

Incidentally, let me add my own praise to your other fans'. Your work has been a favorite of mine since I was a kid.

D. Nick Morris
2711 Carlson Blvd.,
Richmond, CA 94804

You mustn't ask me my opinion of the SF tales of yesteryear. I am not objective. They were what I grew up with and I loved them. In fact, I still write them. My present stories may be written in the 1980s and 1990s, but there's no denying they have the flavor still of the 1940s and 1950s. Some critics look down their pimply noses at my stories for that reason, but it's all I can do.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I have been subscribing to *IAsfm* for about a year now, and I LOVE your magazine! I enjoy just about every story I read. Now and then I read a story and think, "Where's the beef?" But such stories are rare—and, besides, I am sure somebody else enjoyed them. Others may think, "Where's the beef?" when they read stories which I really like. To each one's own, after all.

So far, my favorites include: "A Touch of Lavender," because it had such depth of feeling; "Fool to Believe" (Vive le Cyberpunk! Pat Cadigan proved that this sub-genre is far from dead!); "My Advice to the Civilized," for its observations on the nature of what we call civilization; "Mr. Boy," so delightfully bizarre and imaginative, yet believable in a way; and "The Safe Deposit Box," because it was fascinating, moving *and* imaginative.

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I like just about everything else, and I really enjoy your essays.

I enjoy your magazine so much. I have been avidly seeking back issues. Used book stores sometimes have a few old *IAsfm*'s lurking somewhere, and I have put notices on strategic bulletin boards; but I still have some enormous lacunae in my collection. Is there any way to order specific back issues? If not, I can manage on luck.

I prefer "hard" science fiction to fantasy (magic, dragons, etc.), but I enjoy a good story that successfully blends sorcery and technology—and the odd horror story. Actually, the border between science fiction and fantasy is very hazy, and different people will put the cut-off point at different places where the two shade into each other. Likewise, science fiction "shades into" horror. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is typically thought of as horror, but it can be considered science fiction. On the other hand, some science fiction could fit the definition of horror—for example, the movies *Alien* and *Aliens*, and perhaps Lucius Shepard's "Skull City."

Oops! You got George Lucas and Steven Spielberg confused in your essay on "Shared Universes" in the August issue. 'Twas George who did the Star Wars movies. But I understand the confusion, since they are the two biggest makers of science fiction/adventure films. (Oh well, you're only human!)

Having said enough, I shall now terminate this transmission.

Yours in love of great "scientifiction,"

Freya H. Harris
Atlanta, GA

My confusion of Lucas and Spielberg is but a sign of the fact that I don't pay much attention to the Hollywood scene (or to anything else either, I sometimes think). Being a prolific writer has its penalties, you know, for nothing else seems to matter.

—Isaac Asimov

Some of our older issues are available for $3.50 from: Back Issues, Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462. For more information see page 53.

—Sheila Williams

Dear Doctor,

Just received the Special Double Issue of November 1990, and while this issue, along with some previous issues will have to go onto the shelf because of other pressing demands, I do try to take the time to read your editorial column as well as the letters section.

Those who criticize aficionados of science-fiction as devotees of trash literature, or worse yet, that the addiction to such will cause hair to grow on one's palms (I was warned about this at the early age of five—I am still awaiting even some fuzz), should take the time to read only those two sections of your magazine to discover that erudition is not a stranger to your readers—far from it. And while I may not be able to write as cogently, I am not so "dumb" as to think that I might have any influence in having my proposal realized. Which is why I am writing to someone at the top—if you will permit this unblushing accolade to yourself.

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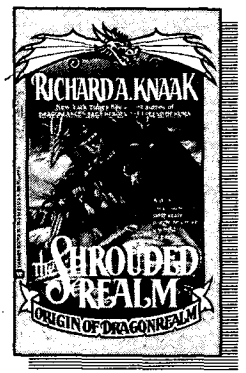

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ALSO THIS MONTH:

THE MERCENARIES
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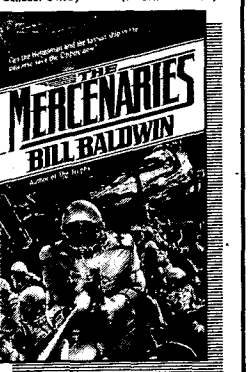

A WORD FROM BRIAN THOMSEN

Sometimes you have to go back to the beginning in order to go forward. With THE SHROUDED REALM we travel back to a time prior to the previous four *Dragonrealm* books to tell the story of how it all began. This is not that different from what Wilf Brimm has to do in THE MERCENARIES, where he must put together a new fighting force almost from scratch. In both books it is a new beginning.

It's sometimes good to begin again, relive old memories, visit familiar haunts, etc. That's why I like series books—they are like old friends who come back to visit.

When you see me around ask me about next month's visit to a past which has never existed.

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Since Presidents Bush and Gorbachev are busily concerned with events of this world, and since your views and expertise extend beyond the confines of our mundane atmosphere, I have a hope that your voice might be raised for a matter that, while it does not have the urgency of the concern for world peace, is, in my opinion, one that would bring recognition of the spirit of universal outlook personified by earlier writers of SF whom I believe helped engender the spirits of men to look beyond their worldly boundaries. In brief—when an astronautic team touches down on Mars, wouldn't it be fitting to have that spot named "Point Barsoom?"

John H. Frederiksson
Arlington, WA

It is not impossible that E. R. Burroughs will be memorialized in this manner. I seem to recall that a Martian crater is named for him.

—Isaac Asimov

My Dear Doctor;

Congrats to you and Mr. Dozois (of Chestertonia) for a wonderful magazine! Thank you also for the information about the bumblebee's curling wings. I've always wondered about that.

The debate over whether or not humanity will ever discover a FTL drive is about as useful as debating the existence of God—the premise can neither be proved nor disproved. Even if we someday discover a theory that would allow for FTL no one can say when or if such a breakthrough will occur. It might not happen for a thousand years. It might happen tomorrow when a scientist accidentally drops a pound of plutonium into a vat of chicken soup. ("I've been to Antares and back! I have proof—I bought postcards!") I totally agree with the premise that until someone invents the damn thing we must relegate FTL to the realm of fantasy. As for those who fervently believe we eventually will have FTL, don't hold your breath. We just might see the Second Coming of the Theological Improbability first.

Before I depart, let me answer Bob Fillpot's question concerning names. "Poul" is apparently pronounced as a soft "pull." I assume "Piers" is pronounced "peerz", but I could be wrong. (Or was it the Anthony part you were having trouble with?) C.J.Cherryh is pronounced as Caroline Cherry. Talent seems to run in the family; her brother, David Cherry, does book covers for the SF field. I do not know how to pronounce Dozois, but if it is a French name the "s" is probably silent.

M.K.Capriola
Manchester, VT

Yes, Gardner pronounces his last name French-fashion (doh-ZWAH). Come to think of it, his name is a very aristocratic one, but he himself is a very down-to-earth fellow with a Puckish sense of humor. He and I get along fine.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I have never written a fan letter in my life, but I recently subscribed to your magazine and, after reading your editorials and replies to letters you've printed, decided it's

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time to give credit where it's due.

When I was very young my mother claims I drove everyone wild with my constant questions about everything around me. But as I got older my environment became much more restricted. The only thing I was allowed to become involved in was our church. Just when science in school was becoming interesting to me I was turned aside from my questions by shock and outrage amongst my church members and parents because so many scientific notions seemed to question the faith of my church. I was told over and over again NEVER to question God, the whys, what fors or hows, but to have "blind faith"—to just believe what my church taught as explanations for everything. If the bible didn't mention the universe, dinosaurs, etc., it was because God didn't think we needed to know. Eventually I closed those avenues in my mind and just memorized answers for tests without becoming involved in the true questions.

Due to my restricted activities I took to reading a lot, mostly gothic romance and westerns (safe books). Then at the age of seventeen I joined the Air Force and was eventually sent to Alaska, leaving my family influences back in Texas. At the age of nineteen I met my now-husband. After laughing at my reading material one day he went out and came back with three books, saying if I wanted to read something interesting, read these. I was not into fantasy type novels at all and almost refused to read what I figured would be silly nonsense, but after reading the first few pages of the first book of a trilogy

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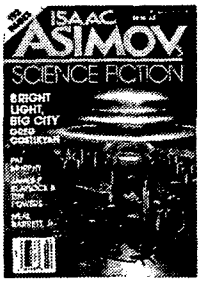

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I found myself drawn out of my naïve little world into a whole new dimension of thought, a whole new galaxy of possibilities. That trilogy changed my whole life. It was the Foundation Trilogy and to this day it still holds a special place in my heart, and they are still my favorite SF books. All the closed doors of my mind were unlocked. It was wonderful, mostly because I could see the plausibility of it. It was less nonsensical than most of the stuff taught to me in church.

From there more and more doors opened up in my mind. Not only did I become aware of the outside universe, but I became more aware of my own planet as well. It was like someone had removed the blinders from my eyes so that I could see ALL around me instead of just in front of my nose.

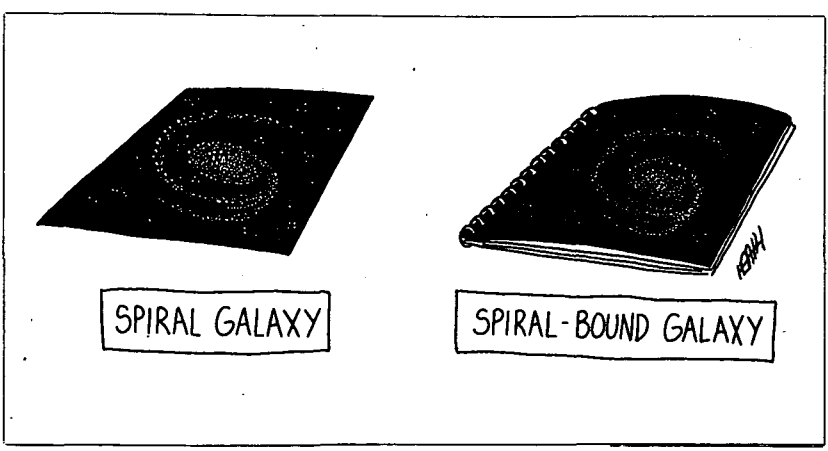
Today I am an avid science fan, a big nature activist and a very open minded person. My life has been richly improved, not to mention downright more interesting, in the years since I first discovered SF. It makes me sad to think of the wasted school years, but I have tried to make up for it over the years. I try to always encourage young kids towards the science section of their libraries. A closed mind is a sad thing and in my book, more of a sin than some of the churches' sins.

This is a heart-felt THANK YOU, Isaac Asimov, for opening doors in my mind. I will always try to follow your example of not closing my own (or any one else's) eyes to the true wonders of the universe and our own world.

Shawna Whiteaker
N. Highlands, CA

There are indeed systems of thought that enshrine ignorance, and good science fiction (not just mine) can be very useful, as you have found out, in stimulating the dormant mind and rescuing it from the sleepy LAND OF NOT-KNOWING. I'm glad of this.

—Isaac Asimov



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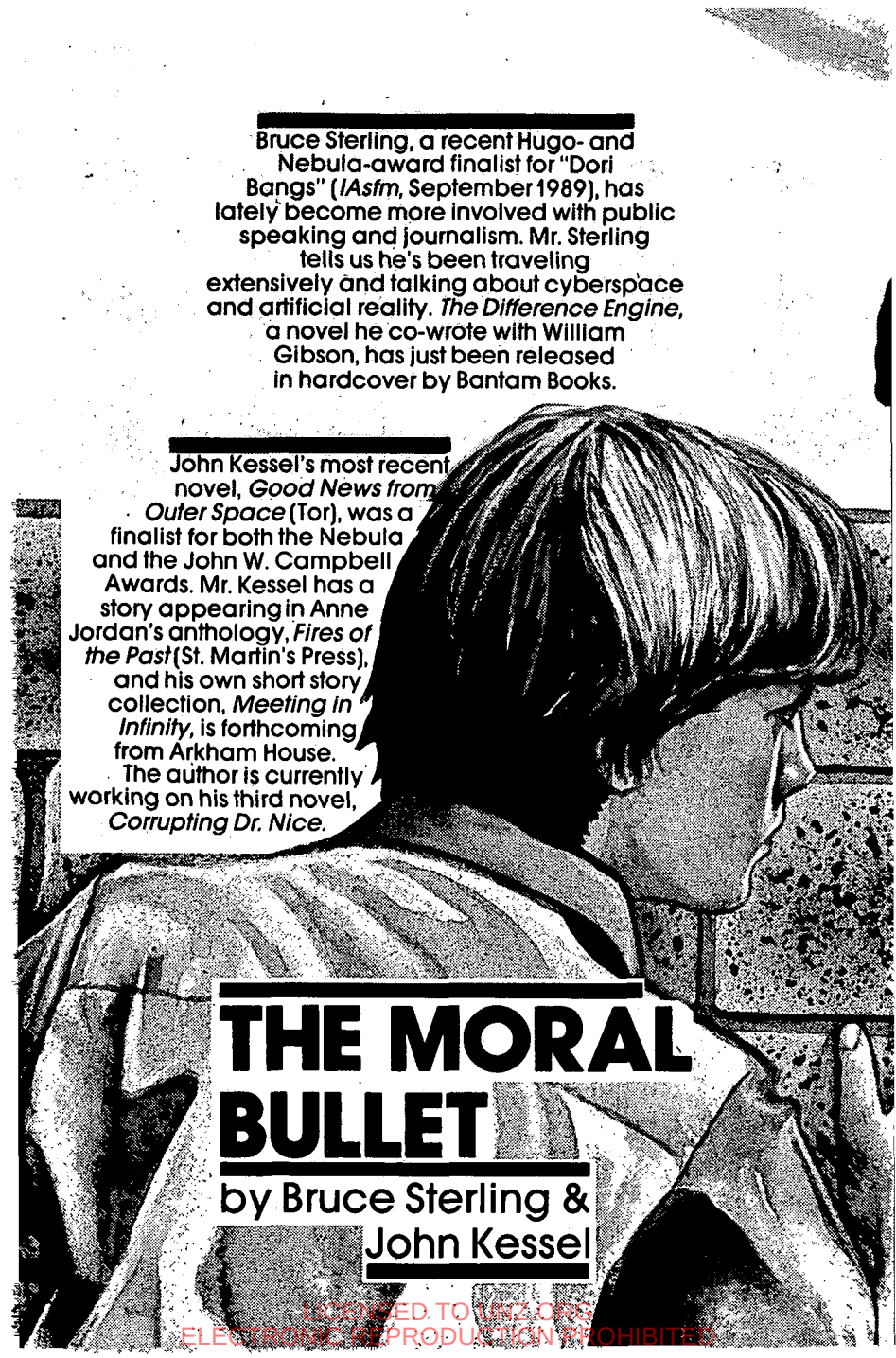
Bruce Sterling, a recent Hugo- and Nebula-award finalist for "Dori Bangs" (*IAsfm*, September 1989), has lately become more involved with public speaking and journalism. Mr. Sterling tells us he's been traveling extensively and talking about cyberspace and artificial reality. *The Difference Engine*, a novel he co-wrote with William Gibson, has just been released in hardcover by Bantam Books.

John Kessel's most recent novel, *Good News from Outer Space* (Tor), was a finalist for both the Nebula and the John W. Campbell Awards. Mr. Kessel has a story appearing in Anne Jordan's anthology, *Fires of the Past* (St. Martin's Press), and his own short story collection, *Meeting in Infinity*, is forthcoming from Arkham House. The author is currently working on his third novel, *Corrupting Dr. Nice*.



THE MORAL BULLET

by Bruce Sterling & John Kessel

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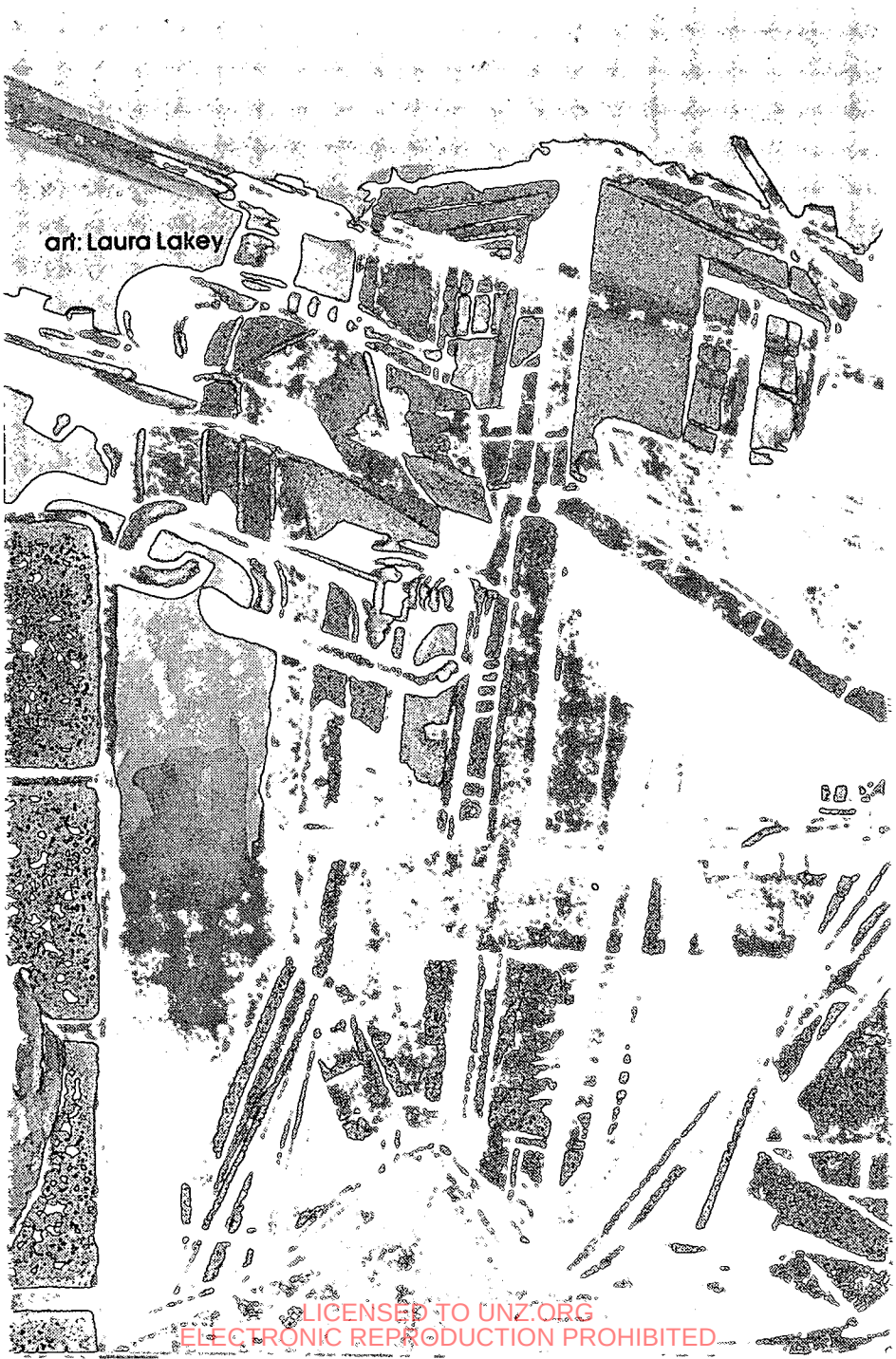

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The throb of a helicopter cruising low over the roof wakes Sniffy from a luxuriant dream about a banana split. His eyes snap open, his heart pounds, he flops out of his bed, to coil up tight beneath the rusting bedsprings, in the grit and dustbunnies. They're after him!

But after a moment the turbine's whine, and his panic, fade. He's just a kid; nobody's really looking for him; nobody gives a damn about a kid. Sniffy crawls out, shivering, and peeks through the blackout curtains. The chopper is receding, in the daylight of summer morning.

Sniffy's mouth waters, anachronistically, for hot fudge, nuts, real whipped cream. A maraschino cherry. Banana splits are the stuff of legend now, but hunger's still real; he's gotta find something or other to eat. He pulls on sneakers, jeans and a T-shirt.

Sniffy's been living in this abandoned duplex for a couple of weeks now, ever since the Chamber of Commerce took over this part of West Raleigh. The Commerce gang sort of take care of Sniffy, though most of the time they basically ignore him, to tell the truth. He hauls his rust-spotted Schwinn from beneath the back stairs, slings his baseball bat—an old George Brett signature—across the handlebars, and pedals up Brooks in the direction of the campus, weaving between the potholes.

This is one of Raleigh's older neighborhoods, heavily wooded. In every yard the pines stand tall and crowded; below them oaks, maples and sweetgums fight for light. Nobody's pruned them in years and with the heavy rains the city's returning to forest. The lacing branches form thick green canopies above the narrower streets, which has been uncommonly handy lately, what with the helicopter raids.

Three burnt-out pickups stretch across the intersection of Brooks and Wade. The busted truck-beds are heaped with leaky sandbags. Grafitti covers the bright flaking wreckage, angry scrawls and morbid boasts from the local militia groups.

A couple of Chamber of Commerce gangsters crouch beside the trucks, peering warily up through the treetops. There's no sign of the helicopter, though. Sniffy leans his bike against a dead fireplug, and scuttles up to join the two men.

Sniffy recognizes them: "Trump" and "Getty." The bigger of the two, the one who calls himself Trump, sports a red polyester baseball cap with a surly wolf stenciled on the front. He's got a black nylon ski-mask, too, tucked floppily into his pistol-belt.

Except for this, Trump looks pretty much like any American civilian used to look in the old days, except that his jeans and shirt are patched and dirty, and he's thinner. And he looks very young. Sniffy tries to imagine what Trump would look like if he were older: forty? Fifty? Sixty-five? It's hard to see this scraggly bearded tough, hardly more than a

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teenager—with sharp, clear, lively eyes—as a vice-president pushing papers across the desk in some bank.

Trump's pal, Getty, crouches lithely by the bullet-riddled bed of the second Toyota. Getty's girlfriend, or maybe his mom or even his grandmother, has stitched his gang-name across the back of his Chamber of Commerce camou-jacket. He's reassembling his assault-rifle. A pair of rags, a long brass rod, and a reeking tray of solvent hang over the edge of the truckbed.

Getty shoves a clip into the rifle. "Keep your butt down, boy!" he says. "You might could get shot."

"What's going on?" Sniffy asks.

"Strange helicopter," Trump says laconically.

"National Guard?"

"European, most likely. Looked like a Swiss flag on 'er; white cross on red. Right, Sniff?"

"Right, that's Switzerland," Sniffy says. He's got a reputation as the bookish type.

"Scoping out the city," Getty says, and looks unhappy.

As if talking about it has called it back, the air throbs with the beating of rotors and a copter slides into view, a hundred yards above the trees. Sniffy ducks through reflex, but then he sees it's a cargo-job—not one of the lethal National Guard battle-copters. He squints, recognizes the starred emblem of the European Community.

The cargo door slides open and the copter dumps a cloud of yellow leaflets. The leaflets are blasted down by the rotor's downdraft, then flutter toward the trees and street. The copter circles off, still dumping.

A thin rain of leaflets settles gently over the roadblock. Sniffy plucks one out of the air. The cheap paper features a grimy photocopy of a dumpy, balding man in thick glasses.

He reads:

REWARD * REWARD * REWARD

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS MAN?

SIDNEY J. HAVERCAMP, calendar age forty-two, blond hair, 160 centimeters tall, weight 84 kilograms. M.D., Ph.D. in biochemistry. Former associate, Burroughs Welcome Research Triangle Facility. The European Community Health Service urgently seeks Dr. Havercamp. His safe delivery to EC representatives will be rewarded by fifty ampules of Free Radical Endocrine Enhancer.

REWARD * REWARD * REWARD

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"Hell," Getty mutters. "Now even the Euros are looking for Havercamp."

"Fifty ampules," Trump says. "A man could live a long, long time on fifty ampules."

"My ass," says Getty. "Hell, if you could get your hands on Sidney Havercamp, you could have all the FREE you wanted."

"Havercamp's dead," Sniffy says brightly. "Died a long time ago, everybody knows that."

"No he's not dead, man," Getty says seriously. "Havercamp's in Costa Rica. They say his dope-posse owns that whole country."

"I heard the Feds have him under wraps," Trump says. "They keep him prisoner in one of the old NORAD sites."

Getty examines the leaflet again. "Fuckin' Euro faggots. 'One hundred and sixty centimeters.' Who the fuck knows what a centimeter is?"

"How tall does that make him, Sniff?" Trump asks.

Sniffy stuffs the leaflet in his jeans pocket. Trump is watching him in a way that makes Sniffy nervous. "Real tall," he says. "Six-five, six-six—a real beanpole. . . . Look out guys—here come a patrol!"

A caravan of four station wagons appears on the crest of the next hill, east on Wade. They're flying militia flags from tall, wobbling C.B. aerials. The glass in all the windows has been replaced with slitted sheet-iron. It's a patrol from the Library Defense League.

The caravan stops at the foot of the hill, considering the Chamber of Commerce outpost. A fat guy in helmet and flak jacket leaps out, collects a few scattered leaflets, leaps back to safety again with a heavy slam of the door. Then the cars turn south, down Gardner, rolling sluggishly back toward their own turf on the university campus.

The Chamber of Commerce men begin to breathe normally again. "Yeah man, those Library boys," Trump drawls, his eyes slitted. "They never have the guts for a face-off."

"Yeah," Getty muses with nonchalant menace. "Them intellectuals all wanna live forever."

It's true that the eggheads of the Library Defense League usually avoid close combat. However, they've cunningly staked out all of West Raleigh on accurate artillery grids. A battery of 105-millimeter cannon lurks in the top floor of the D.H. Hill Tower, on the north edge of campus. A definite possibility exists that the L.D.L. might airmail a sudden barrage this way.

Getty washes his hands, greasy from the gun-clenching, with a gush of brown water from a five-gallon plastic jug. He inspects his fingernails cautiously. Bad to start with, the solvent hasn't done them much good. His thumbnail is cracked.

Sniffy's nails are even worse, worn down far below the quick. His

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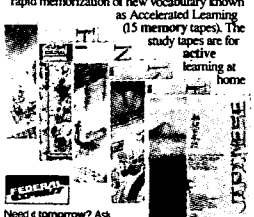

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fingertips bulge with calloused skin. His hair is two blond inches of frizzy split-ends. It's not that he cuts his hair short. Over the years, Sniffy's hair has simply worn out while still rooted in his skull, like the fur on an old horsehair sofa.

As for Trump, he's wearing a valuable antique set of Lee Press-On Nails.

A humid breeze rustles the oak trees, blowing one of the leaflets against Trump's sneaker. He plucks it off, examines it. "Maybe these Euros plan to move in permanently. Try and take us over." He impales the flyer on the Toyota's rusty aerial. The aerial pierces Sidney Havercamp's photocopied left eye.

"They better not," Getty says.

A car honks, distantly. The driver's hitting his horn while still a block away, which is standard practice when approaching a militia roadblock. Trump tugs the black ski-mask over his face and swaggers out in the road, while Getty covers him with his M-16.

"Wish I had a gun," Sniffy says.

"I dunno, Sniff," Getty mutters. "That time with the nuns and the shotgun, y'all didn't handle it too good."

The van pulls up. It's the Kentucky Fried Chicken man, and his personal bodyguard. The Chamber of Commerce guys enjoy fried chicken as much as anybody, but Trump demands a toll payment anyway.

The chicken man digs into a bulging wallet full of militia passes. He's got them all. Library Defense League, Brown Berets, Raleigh Police Department, Christian Faith Militia, Bellevue Terrace Community Watch, Popular Front for the Liberation of Robeson County. Even the little splinter groups and dope posses who control only a block or two, like the Preacher's Crew and the John-Johns.

"That copter hit your end of town?" Trump asks.

"Yessir. Dumpin' leaflets all over. Thought I saw 'em try to land, over by the campus."

"Think they'll find ol' Havercamp?"

The chicken man laughs nervously, nods at his bodyguard. "Bobby here says Havercamp is the Antichrist. The one that made these bad things to happen."

"He's got one eye and ten horns," says Bobby.

"Ought to make him easy to spot," Trump says.

Bobby just stares at him. Bobby's a large black guy with part of his face missing. Car-bomb work. No wonder he thinks the world is coming to an end.

The chicken man finds a Chamber of Commerce pass—but it's expired. So he gives up, and hands Trump five old silver quarters. Trump gives him a new pass, and messily whacks it with a rubber stamp.

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With this transaction safely over, Sniffy approaches the car. "Hey," he says, sticking his frizzy blond head through the open window, "you got any chicken livers?"

"What's it to you, kid?" says Bobby.

"I got twenty milligrams here, for some chicken livers."

That changes matters. The chicken man gives Sniffy a cardboard box of cold fried livers, in exchange for the homemade ampule.

The chicken men drive off, weaving cautiously down the potholed length of Wade Avenue, toward the next checkpoint. Trump looks at Sniffy, speculatively. "Seems like you always got a spare shot of FREE, Sniffy."

"And it's always really good-quality, too," grumbles Getty.

It's borne home to Sniffy how he's gotten careless in the last months, as if being on friendly terms with the Chamber of Commerce made him safe. Being a kid deflected a lot of suspicion, but the Swiss helicopter and these bales of leaflets are going to heat things up again.

"It's in the nose," Sniffy says, tapping it. "I may be just a kid, but I can tell quality chemistry, just by smelling it. If it weren't for me, us Commerce guys would get burned all the time on bad FREE." He straps the chicken-box to the back of his bike. "You guys want a chicken liver? Lotta good iron in a chicken-liver. Real good for your bone-marrow."

"You sure know a lot about nutrition and that stuff, Sniff," Getty says.

A bead of sweat runs down Sniffy's ribs. He's too damn talkative for his own good. He picks up his baseball bat, measures the distance to the tray of solvent on the truck bed. Maybe he can knock the solvent into Getty's face, then whip the bat into Trump's gut before Trump can squeeze off a shot.

Maybe not, though.

They're not really on to him. He's imagining things. This is no time for panic. "Well boys, I got to move on," Sniffy says.

Turning his back on them, trying hard not to hurry, he mounts his bike and pedals off.

Out of sight of the roadblock, he sneaks across Wade and into L.D.L. territory. He knows he's running a risk, but he needs information more than he needs safety. He probably shouldn't have come back to Raleigh at all, but at least he does know the city from his years at the lab, and hiding out on the Carolina dirt farm was boring him to death. A guy can only eat so many cans of chili.

Besides, he's made out pretty well over the years by improvising, and he isn't ready to panic yet. Brains still count for something.

He pedals through the old neighborhoods. Years of moldering leaves choke the broken gutters. Kudzu smothers the porch rails of former shot-

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houses and gang-centers, now derelict and blackened by Molotovs. Doors, walls, and windowframes are lavishly bullet-pocked. Here and there, roofs have been knocked in by mortar-fire or rocket grenades.

It's surprising, though, how many Raleighites have survived the endless years of troubles. Like Sniffy, they've learned to become unobtrusive. The doors are reinforced now, barred and triple bolted, backed by sheet-iron or concrete. Windows are shuttered, the glass taped against the prospect of sudden concussions.

A kind of demented routine has settled in. There are vegetable gardens, chicken coops, bomb shelters, private water tanks, basements, trenches, tunnels. Lately, the electric power's been on again, for two or three hours a day. And the water runs once a week.

Most of the locals have loyally stenciled their doors with L.D.L. insignia. A few houses feature North Carolina flag-decals, but not many, since the National Guard atrocities.

The east side of campus is quiet. On the corner by the Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Sniffy sees an L.D.L. steerer pushing the library's dope to a dozen shot-hungry Raleighites. As it happens, these customers are senior citizens, yanked back by the Free Radical Endocrine Enhancer from the brink of death by old age.

Those few oldsters who have survived the years of troubles have been taking shots longer than anyone else. The aged were the first of the population to get a steady supply, back in the days when there was still a national health-care policy, and a government to back it up. As they bargain skeptically in their cautious group, they appear blissfully, unnaturally spry. The life-infusing FREE shots have worked absolute wonders on them. Except for a few unavoidable details.

Sniffy's practiced eye spots the symptoms easily. A frizzy white-haired gal triumphantly displays sleek legs in tight jogging shorts, but her puffy blouse and windbreaker can't conceal a dowager's hump. Osteoporosis; that's a difficult syndrome.

A grinning smooth-faced geezer restlessly swings his heavy cane. Advanced degenerative arthritis; his knees are still bad.

The very old make interesting case-studies. At one time, back in his scientist days, Sniffy would have given his right arm to get them into the lab with a control group. But who wants to be in a control group? That's pretty much the whole problem, in a nutshell. No one wants to grow old. Get a steady supply of FREE when you're young, though, and you never do. In theory, it was a wonderful prospect. The practice hasn't quite panned out.

The problem's simple enough. If there's not enough dope to go around, it's gotta mean somebody's cheating. If there are shortages, if the price is too high, it's because somebody's stealing your share of FREE, stealing

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and shooting-up the years of your life! It's obvious when you think about it. Only a fool would trust those government crooks and hustlers, with their big connections. They expect you to grow old gracefully, because they don't have to. All those politicians and millionaires will dance on your grave a hundred years from now, and laugh at you for being such a sucker.

Unless you get them first, that is. If you want your share, you gotta make connections.

So everybody starts making connections. That puts a strain on things. As soon as the government falls, you really need connections, just to survive. Kinda funny how fast the logic of chaos hits. Kind of a modern miracle. Not exactly the miracle he'd had in mind, but then, he doesn't remember having had much of anything in mind, at the time.

The yellow leaflets are everywhere. Sniffy forces himself to ignore them. He rides fearlessly past the barbed-wire lawn of the L.D.L. shothouse, ignoring the snipers in the bell-tower, and waves cheerily to the guards in their sandbagged kiosk. The guards let him pass. They, too, recognize Sniffy's usefulness.

He pedals on down Pullen, then ditches his bike in the hedges, on the bank above the old football practice field. He crawls through the thick photinia and crosses the field of tents and shacks, where the Robeson County refugees live, to the hospital tent. He's looking for the hospital doctor, Cecily Russell. The refugee camp and Red Cross field hospital are there on L.D.L. sufferance. The L.D.L. would prefer to have Dr. Russell work only for them, but as long as she gives preference to L.D.L. casualties, they're willing to let her doctor some others. Cecily Russell is the closest thing to a welfare agency left.

At length Sniffy finds her in a corner of one of the tents. She's eating a skimpy breakfast of brown rice. Her white cotton smock is bloodied from surgery. "Cecily!" Sniffy says.

She looks up, frowns. "I keep telling you: call me Dr. Russell," she says testily. Her hair has gone lackluster from poor diet, and her glasses are held together with wire and surgical tape. When she was thirty-five, Sniffy recalls, she looked more attractive than she does now at twenty or so.

"Don't get uptight, Cecily."

"Go away, Sidney."

Sniffy looks around to see if anybody's heard. "Don't call me that."

"Now who's uptight?"

"I brought you some chicken livers," Sniffy says. "For you, or the kids here . . . you know . . . whatever." Sniffy sets the chicken box on the hospital's wooden picnic table, which has been stolen from a public park. He sits beside her on the bench, digs out a handful of cold livers, crams

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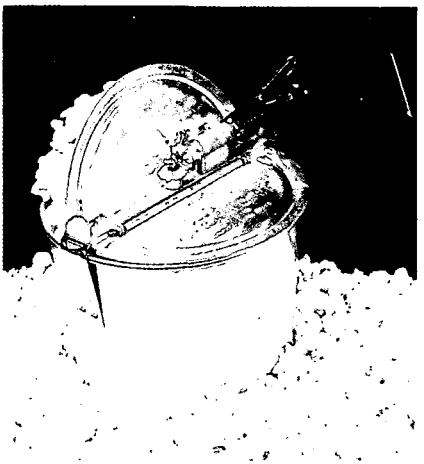

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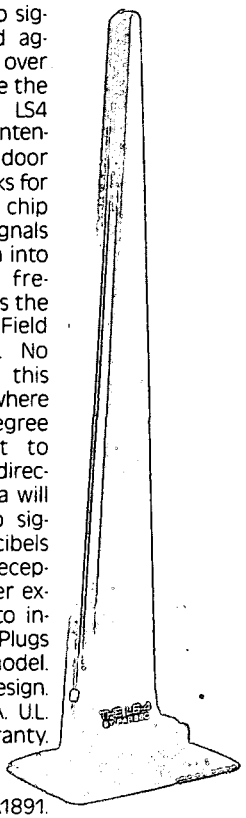

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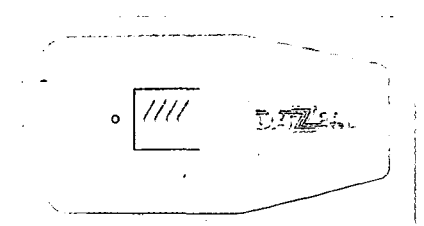

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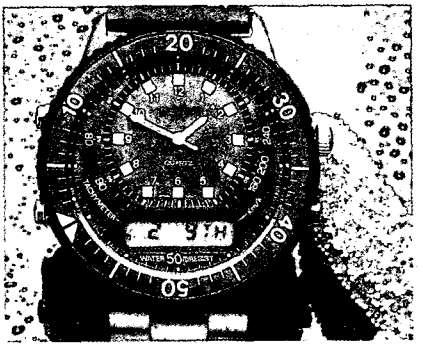

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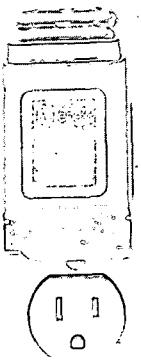

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them into his mouth. "You need some iron, Cecily. Help that low red corpuscle count. Enhancer bone-marrow depletion."

"Why do you do this stuff? Every time I figure I've got you pegged as a mercenary little creep, you do something nice."

"Maybe it's love."

"Uh-huh."

"I don't know why I do it, Cecily. Who cares about that stuff? Life's for the living. That's my philosophy."

"I guess that works pretty well if you're not dead."

"And we're not, are we. We're younger than we ever were."

"Right. I just wonder what kind of man wants to be twelve years old forever."

"This? This is purely practical. Supplies of FREE are erratic. The best insurance I have against a prolonged drought is to build up an age cushion. This way, even if I run out, it'll be years before I even hit puberty."

"Don't you miss puberty?"

Cecily is very big on guilt trips, but Sniffy is immune. "Not in any way that really matters."

Russell puts down her spoon and stares into her bowl. She picks out something. A weevil, maybe.

Sniffy pulls the leaflet from his pocket, slides it in front of her. "Listen, Cecily, what about this European helicopter? Pretty threatening to see them hunting for one of us. The old team and all. Once a thing like that gets started, who knows where it will end? They get a foothold here, they might just try to take over."

"Fine by me. Maybe they can impose some order on this chaos."

"What about our freedom? Don't you believe in the stars and stripes?"

"I believe in antibiotics and public health. And a few less automatic weapons would help."

"Now, now. Someday you'll thank me for this. When the troubles are over, and things settle down."

"When will that be? A hundred years?"

"Maybe," he shrugs. "Why should that bother us?"

"We'll both be dead, you little fool!"

Sniffy laughs. "Possibly. But not from old age, that 's for sure."

"Go ahead, laugh, but you're in trouble." Dr. Russell shakes her head wearily, her eyes glazed with fatigue. "One of their helicopters is parked over in the brickyard right now."

"Do you know what this is all about?"

"They probably want to rip your lungs out for transplants. Or put you on trial."

"On trial for what?"

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She looks at him with open loathing. "Why don't you leave me alone?"

Good old Cecily, the selfless humanitarian. He'd always been a big devotee of public benefactors. Especially when they had grant money. But what right did she have to be so stiff-necked? All this was just an episode, a necessary social adjustment—compared with the Ultimate Life-Enhancing Benefits of Modern Medicine's Astonishing Miracle Breakthrough.

"Cecily, we need to find out what's going on."

She ignores him. "You should head for the hills. I'll keep my mouth shut."

"Sure you will."

Russell looks at the leaflet. "Why should I help you anyway?"

"Because of the chicken livers. And because, if I didn't come here, who'd give you your shots?"

"I don't want any more of your shots!"

Sniffy pulls a vial from the pocket of his jeans. He palms it expertly, twists the top off, sniffs carefully. "Pure as gold," he whispers. "Crisp, dry and smooth, with a distinctive varietal flavor."

"Go away," she says hopelessly.

"You know you can't keep up this pace of work without your shots. And if you get weak, or sick, or even just too tired, think how many here will die."

A light drug-hungry sweat beads the hollows of the doctor's temples. "Well, this isn't the place for it. . . ."

Sniffy glances over his shoulder, down the length of the hospital tent. Victims of mortar and sniper fire sprawl on their khaki-colored cots, wrapped in bloodied gauze. "I could pop you a quick one, in the leg. But I need some new works first. My old ones are getting dull."

"You can't have any more of my needles."

"Heck, Cecily, who'll miss a hypodermic here? You're Red Cross, you can get plenty."

"No. They're for the sick and dying!"

"Hey, without a proper taste of FREE, everybody's dying, every minute. That's the human condition, right? Used to be, anyhow."

She gives in, and they slip into the screened-off surgery at the end of the tent. "You don't have to act like this," she hisses. "You're not really twelve, even if you feel and look like you are. You don't have to nag and pester me in this compulsive, juvenile way."

"Don't get Freudian on me," Sniffy says. "You're the one with the stone-obvious self-sacrificial death wish."

Dr. Russell bites her lip, turns her back on him. She bends a little, tugs her trousers down over one hip. Sniffy jabs neatly through the vial top, sucks the drug into the hypo with an analytic look. He gives her

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buttock a sharp proprietarial spank, and jabs the needle in. A quick squeeze, and out again.

"Damn," she says. "That thing IS dull."

They sit again on the picnic bench. Sniffy, something of a connoisseur of the effects of FREE, watches with interest as color floods Cecily's sallow cheeks. She stretches, yawns, shivers, tries to hide a grin.

Uniformed men appear at the entrance of the tent. Europeans! Sniffy ducks and scrambles back to the surgery.

He watches warily around the edge of the surgery screen, as Russell rises to greet the intruders: two khaki-clad privates carrying elegant-looking French automatic rifles, and a sergeant in a peaked cap. The sergeant's smooth chin is shaved blue and looks about as hard as granite. One of the privates pulls a cart carrying white boxes of medical supplies, stenciled with red crosses.

"May I help you gentlemen?"

"Are you Dr. Cecily Russell, in charge of this camp?"

"Yes I am."

"Herr Spittzler of the European Red Cross sends you his greetings," the sergeant said. "We are on a mission of mercy and goodwill. We bring these supplies as a gift."

"Any hypodermic needles?"

"Some."

"That's great. What can I do for you, then?"

"We need your aid, doctor, in our negotiations with all local militia groups. We hope to arrange a general cease-fire, and establish economic relations. . . ." The sergeant glances at the picnic table. "I see that you have our leaflet. Can you aid us in our search for Dr. Havercamp?"

"He's probably dead."

"We doubt that. Our reports say he is the very clever man."

"I haven't seen Dr. Havercamp in years. Why are you looking for him?"

"Let us only say we want him. And of course, he is a criminal."

Cecily shifts a bit from foot to foot. "The, uh, medical research he was engaged in—that wasn't illegal, you know."

"Not illegal, but criminally irresponsible."

"What are you going to do with him?"

The sergeant smiles. "We shoot him—with the moral bullet." He touches his index finger to the middle of his forehead. "Right between the eyes."

That's enough for Sniffy. Time to hit the road. No way to get past these soldiers, though. These are no sloppy militia amateurs, but wary-looking hard-bitten veteran military professionals, totally disciplined and dutiful and spooky, the kind of people he hasn't seen in ages.

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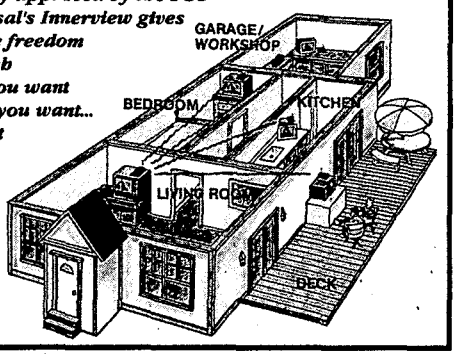

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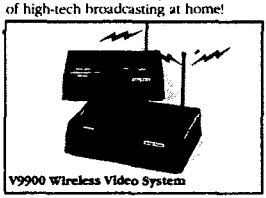

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Sniffy spies a scalpel on a stainless-steel cart, just past the screen. If he can filch it, he can slice his way through the back of the tent.

He crouches down silently, leans out behind the shelter of the cart, tries a grab, misses. Damn. He waits. They're still talking. He tries again, touches the hilt of the scalpel. . . .

Someone grabs his wrist and yanks him up. One of the soldiers.

"Who is this?" the sergeant demands.

Russell looks flustered. "That's my—my son. Chip," she says. "Chip, what were you doing, hiding back there?"

"Sorry, mom. I was just curious."

"Curiosity killed the cat, young man."

"Herr Spittzler did not tell us that you have a son," the sergeant says.

"How would he know?"

Time for the helpless kid routine. "You're not gonna shoot me, are you, mister?" Sniffy whimpers. He squirms in the grasp of the soldier.

"Release him," the sergeant says. The soldier lets go, takes a step back.

Sniffy tugs his T-shirt straight. "Thanks, sergeant. I was afraid you guys were Nazis or something."

The sergeant stares at Sniffy. "How old are you, young man?"

"Twelve."

"So you are born since Dr. Havercamp's great discovery? You don't remember the world before the change? How is it you learn about bad men like Nazis?"

"I learned in school."

"The schools are lately not working, I understand."

"Mom taught me."

"He's very bright," Russell says, without conviction.

The sergeant's eyes narrow. "I think he is very clever, this boy. I think he comes along with us to meet Herr Spittzler."

So much for misdirection. Sniffy flings himself to the ground with a howl of terror. Before their embarrassed shock can fade, Sniffy darts on hands and knees beneath the cot of a casualty. They can't get a shot off while he's in the midst of the sick. Ducking, leaping, sometimes trampling the patients, he evades the sergeant's attempt to block him, and dashes out the front of the tent.

Outside, he knows the place, they don't. In a minute and a half, weaving through tents and behind the stadium along the track, he's up the embankment and out. He retrieves his bike and his bat and speeds down the hill to Western Boulevard.

A fat lot of good a baseball bat will do him now. And now they know what he looks like! He really is going to have to get himself a gun.

Sniffy feels a little safer when he hits Chamber of Commerce territory.

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He's not an official member of the Commerce gang or anything, but General Rockefeller, their head, is his pal.

The L.D.L. is clearly awed by the Europeans, since they let them land in their turf. They've already struck some deal. If these Euros are trying to ingratiate themselves with the militia groups, that's all the more reason for Sniffy to get to Rockefeller first.

The Chamber HQ is one of the biggest shot-houses in Raleigh, maybe in the whole state of North Carolina. It's a mansion on White Oak, a white antebellum sprawl with a pillared porch like Tara, covered with sandbags. Twin trenches cut the streets east and west of it, dug-in roadblocks, anchored by machine-gun nests. Ack-ack guns lurk on the mansion's roof, to keep the copters off. A half-track is parked on the lawn, under a pegged-out tarpaulin.

The sight of all these guns makes the customers confident. There's a big crowd of the shot-hungry here, shuffling in with a glazed impatience, then gliding out with that loose-looking happy step that comes with a skinful of FREE. Some are wealthy and have come in their cars, but they parked blocks away; there's no way the wily Commerce boys will let a car-bomb near their HQ. You only have to have your ass blown up once, to get hip to that trick.

A skinny tout in a Commerce jacket and sunglasses assembles the customers in the shade of the porch. He marches up and down the line, checking their faces for the proper vibe of submission and dope-greed. As he walks and peers, he chants at them; kind of an auctioneer's spiel. "Open for bidness, folks, open and smokin'! Got them Green-Top vials, fresh shipment from the brothers in Chapel Hill! Buy y'self five, get one for play. Ten silver quarters for a jugular hit!"

Sniffy crosses the lawn and clomps up the porch. He doesn't see any yellow flyers lying around here, but that doesn't much reassure him. He feels like someone's gonna collar him any minute. It isn't fair.

Down the mansion's big entrance hall there's a barred nook where the house's bag man sits. He's taking in money, passing out vials, with the crisp fluid ease of habit. Old biker's tattoos show, very faded, on the dewy fresh skin of his arms. He has a frizzy crew-cut, a chubby face, and a holstered .45 in one sweaty armpit.

"Have that money ready folks," he calls, in a high, sweet voice. "Have them dimes and quarters counted and ready, or you lose y'all's turn in line. Jabbin' parlor up the stairs to your left, we got a special today on jugular hits, a real M.D., folks! Got a real gentle hand. Ten silver quarters, and get that goodness straight to y'all's brain tissue!"

The Chamber of Commerce HQ possesses the modern miracle of air conditioning. The A.C. is a status symbol and the Chamber runs it whenever they can spare the fuel.

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The mansion is packed to the walls with loot. It spills right into the halls, room doors jammed open with collapsing stacks of goodies. Crates of whiskey, vodka, tequila—the real stuff, not moonshine. A whole room crammed with video recorders. Another full of ten-speed bikes, wheels and frames neatly disassembled. Three-piece men's suits, all styles and sizes, hung on shiny wheeled racks. Lots of mink and sable, with some sad moth damage; furs are hard to keep through a Carolina summer.

The Chamber has lost the habit of guarding their "valuables." Nowadays it's food that really counts; bags of rice and beans. You can smell them but not see them; they're snookered away.

Sniffy goes on back toward Rockefeller's office, where Lindsey, Rockefeller's secretary, holds court. Lindsey was once the wife of a Governor of North Carolina. She's maybe eighty-five, but looks about thirty, and wears enough jewelry to choke an old-fashioned Vegas showgirl. It's real gold and emeralds and diamonds. Or at least she thinks it's real. All the Commerce guys like her because she's so crazy, so they never tell her otherwise.

Today she's busy talking to three Chamber toughs. Everybody seems pretty excited, shuffling around whispering and peering back toward the General's office.

When Sniffy approaches, Lindsey jumps up, a big frozen grin on her face. It's enough to make even Sniffy flinch. "Sniffy, you charming boy, how are you? Haven't seen you for an age!"

"Lindsey, I need to talk to the General."

"I'm afraid he's busy," she says. "Hadn't you heard? We have some European visitors—Swiss I think. They're in there with him right now. And they have a TV camera! They want to do a documentary about us!" This explains Lindsey's demented energy. The thought of being on TV again has triggered some deep-buried media reflexes.

"I remember television," one of the toughs says.

"Think they got any hard cash on 'em?" another asks. "Maybe some o' that European paper money."

"They probably got credit cards," the third says.

"I REMEMBER credit cards," the first guy says.

Sniffy hops up and down to get their attention. "I came to warn the General about these guys. I was just over at the Red Cross camp. These Euro bastards are hooked up with the Library gang—they want to put us out of business!"

Lindsey looks at him with fatuous credulity. "Maybe you better go back there, Sniffy."

So Sniffy pushes past the desk and through the General's office. The door is open and he walks right in.

Rockefeller's office has Persian rugs, walnut paneling and gold-sten-

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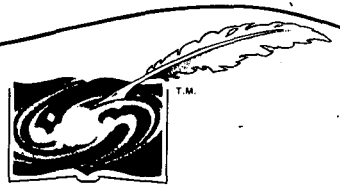

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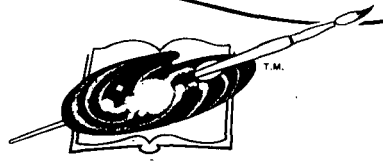

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ciled leather chairs looted from the State Capitol. All the windows are securely bricked up. An open closet door shows more loot: a microcomputer, an open case of Canadian Club, boxes of light bulbs, tins of sardines. There's a lot of stuffed animal heads on the walls, big game trophies. Elks, bears, and moose, mostly. Too many, probably. There's about fifty of them.

Rockefeller wears a Giorgio Armani gray wool suit, a gold-threaded gambler's waistcoat, and silver-spurred python-skin cowboy boots. He's chewing meditatively on a Mars Bar, an item of great rarity and price. He's talking with two blond men in baggy black cotton pants and white shirts. They are unarmed. One of them holds a floppy sun-hat on his lap; the other has a compact video-camera, and moves deftly around the room.

One of Rockefeller's lieutenants, Forbes, lounges by the door, in a baseball hat and flak-jacket. Rockefeller looks up as Sniffy enters. Rockefeller smiles broadly. Sniffy realizes at that moment that Rockefeller has read the leaflets.

The blond man sitting in the chair turns to inspect Sniffy. "Who is this?" He has an odd accent, like he studied his English in Britain.

"This here's Sniffy. Howdy, Sniff. Long time no see."

"At your service, General," Sniffy says. "You know you can count on me. But I wouldn't trust these guys."

"This is Herr Spittzler," the General says. "And Signor Andolini."

"I am pleased to meet you," Spittzler says, rising from the chair. He moves like he's got a pole stuck up his ass. "But you are wrong to mistrust our intentions. We are here to help you."

"Last we heard about the situation over the water, you guys needed help yourselves," Rockefeller says.

"Conditions in Europe are much improved," replies Spittzler. "We have developed a working system of Enhancer distribution. We are past the stage of social breakdown and chaos."

Sniffy takes a seat on the sofa against the wall, and keeps an eye on the door, in case he needs to beat a retreat. Not much use in hoping for that, though. It would take heavy artillery to fight your way out of this shot-house. He'll have to play this situation out to a finish, right here.

"Glad to hear it," Rockefeller says. "Y'all had it pretty bad, I hear."

"We lost two million in Switzerland alone. Fifty million in Europe overall. Most in the first years of the crisis. The worst is past, now."

Rockefeller sobers. "That's a lot. Wonder how many America lost."

"We estimate ninety-five million," Spittzler says readily. "Maybe many more. Estimates are difficult, in the absence of a federal census or central authority."

"My God," Rockefeller muses, "ninety-five million!"

"We estimate the global population at only three billion, now. That

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means three billion people have died in the last fifteen years." Spittzler pauses. If he's not the cleanest person Sniffy has seen in the last ten years, he's a close runner-up. His blue eyes are calm and precise and even though he looks twenty-five Sniffy figures he's at least fifty. Then again, he probably looked just as over-controlled when he was twenty-five for real. "May I ask you," Spittzler says, "your opinion of this terrible catastrophe?"

Rockefeller takes a meditative bite of his Mars Bar.

"Well," Sniffy breaks in, "that leaves the survivors some room, anyhow. I mean, people used to worry a lot about the tremendous strain on global resources. What with the vast increase in human lifespan, and all."

"Thanks to the social breakdown brought on by FREE—the plagues and starvation—the average lifespan today is less than twenty years."

"Y'all sure are big on statistics," Rockefeller says. "What's the point of all this?"

"The point is that we must heal the wounds to civilization," Spittzler says. "The European Community can now feed itself, with surplus for export. The United Nations has been re-established in Geneva. We have plans for restoring world order and trade."

Rockefeller crumples his candy wrapper and tosses it at a wastebasket. "Well, the Raleigh Chamber of Commerce is all for world trade. I mean, we're the strongest banking and resource center in the Piedmont. And we're prepared to deal. Raleigh's the capital of North Carolina, a big strategic center. Once we take over this city, we're poised to move on Charlotte, Richmond, Charleston—up and down the whole Eastern seaboard. It's rich country, too. We got whatever you Europeans need: dope, tobacco, you name it! You help us, we help you!"

Rockefeller bends and hauls a large crate from beneath his massive office desk. He tugs it one-handed around the desk into the center of the room, ruffling the Persian carpet. Sniffy has seen this box before, but Rockefeller has always been pretty secretive about its contents. It's khaki-colored metal, the size of a deluxe microwave oven, with U.S. military stencils. He opens it on a squeaking hinge. "This is a U.S. Army Model M3 50-Caliber Heavy Machine Gun," he announces, hauling the monster out by its perforated matte-black barrel. "Now this baby was a total design breakthrough! Real Yankee know-how, right? Ceramic barrel, foamed metal stock and tripod, weighs half what the old Browning 50-Caliber did. The rate of fire kicks ass, there's no recoil to speak of, and the slugs can pierce battleship armor."

Rockefeller shakes his head mournfully. "They didn't make many of these, though. They were barely off the Pentagon production-line, when the shit hit the fan. Experimental model, really. Cost a fortune to make 'em. I've never even fired it; I was lucky to find one."

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He grins at Spittzler, slaps an ammunition belt into the feed tray. The Swiss looks poker-faced. Andolini focuses his camera on the gun, and Rockefeller obligingly shows it off. "Bet you got nothing like this over there. Shit, everybody knows y'all in Europe were only good for making watches! But you can copy any American breakthrough, right? Better, if you got the krauts to manage the factories and the wops to work the line." He draws a breath. "So I tell you what. Y'all give me thirty of these, with ammo belts to match, and I'll give you the City of Raleigh. Simple as that!"

"Weapons are not an answer to this global crisis."

"They'll do till a better one comes along."

Spittzler nods calmly. "We have a better answer now," he says. "The moral bullet."

"Say what?"

Spittzler's voice takes on a schoolmarmish tone. "People want longer lives, from medicine—not a faster death from guns. The problem centers on a proper distribution of the medical resources. The moral bullet has given us a system that works, without violence and greed."

"People are never satisfied, Spittzler."

"Even if I grant you that everybody has the ape in them, they can still be socialized. They have the angel in them, too. The Endocrine Enhancer has freed us from human mortality; we humans must now act morally in a manner which matches our new potentials. Together with each dose of FREE, we distribute—the moral bullet. It is our own medical breakthrough, the proper complement to the rejuvenation drug. It is the Empathic Enhancer."

Sniffy's curiosity is piqued. "This is some kind of neurophysiological agent? Not a real bullet?"

"No, not a bullet. It affects the limbic system. I am not a neurologist, and cannot explain its workings, but it vastly increases our compassion, our sympathy for fellow human beings. It restores the person's capacity to act morally."

"Doesn't sound very moral to me," Rockefeller says. "Sounds like some kind of mind-altering drug. You say everybody in Europe is shooting up this stuff?"

"Not everyone. Simply those who take the rejuvenation drug. Immortality cannot come without a price. Better the moral bullet than the physical one."

"That's brainwashing!" Sniffy says. "Maybe you got a bunch of sheep over there ready to give up freedom for security, but this is America." Despite himself Sniffy's getting drawn into this argument. The clash of ideas has always stimulated him.

"We are not entirely happy with the system, either," Spittzler says.

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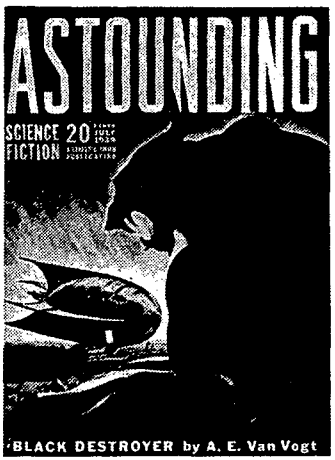

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"It is an improvement over chaos, but manufacturing and distributing both these drugs still strains our limited resources. We have a bolder plan yet: we will alter the human genetic system so that the human body itself produces both FREE and the moral bullet, internally. When human nature is permanently changed on the cellular level—then we can say that the angel has overwhelmed the ape. We will finally transcend this squalid catastrophe, to enter a new order of being."

"That's pretty ambitious," Sniffy says.

"We are working very hard at it," Spittzler says. "Unfortunately, progress is slow."

"Yeah, I bet," Sniffy says. "Cellular synthesis of endocrine enhancer would take a major design breakthrough. Not to mention that other gunk. . . . It would take more than just hard work. It'd take genius."

"That is why we want Sidney Havercamp," Spittzler says. "He is a genius. But he's also an amoral sociopath. He is the one who created this tragedy. You give Havercamp to us. We shoot him with the moral bullet, and put him to work in the World Health Organization's pharmaceutical labs in Zurich. Then we will do better than merely dole out the youth drug. We will transform the world."

"I prefer the old-fashioned kind of bullets," Rockefeller says. "They're still a lot cheaper, plus a lot more permanent."

Spittzler ignores him. "I can't imagine Havercamp is using his abilities here," he continues. "It is a waste of his intellect. Let us take him back, where he can work again in the service of mankind, and atone for his great crime."

Spittzler's voice is cool. It's the kind of infuriating voice that used to drive Sniffy wild when he was in grad school. His girlfriend, the ice maiden, Miss Moral Philosophy of 1996, had a voice like that. "Crime, huh?" Sniffy says. "You'll thank Sidney Havercamp on your knees when you're two hundred years old, buster."

Spittzler inspects him calmly. "It's the greatest crime in history."

"History's over, man! We can outlive history now."

"Why are you defending Dr. Havercamp? It is your country that was ruined. We suffered in Europe, but we endure. We are coming back. Poor America today is nothing but a collection of bandit kingdoms, many of them no bigger than a few city blocks. Not even kingdoms—pitiful drug-gangs."

"Watch your mouth, pal!" Rockefeller says. "What makes you so great?"

"I don't wish to argue with you. All you need do, is look at the sad life in your own nation. The sight is almost unbearable. I fear you will all die in this endless anarchy; there will be no one left here to help, when we step in to gather up the pieces."

Rockefeller leans on his desk, fists clenched. "That's what this is really

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all about, isn't it? Well, if you think you can just step in here and take over, you faggot cuckoo-clock-winders are in for a surprise. Maybe we're down, but it don't take but one half-witted American fighting-man to whup a whole platoon of your candyass bleeding-heart soldiers. If it weren't for us bailing you out, you'd be speaking Russian now, or German."

"I do speak German. Russian, too."

"It figures. Nazi superman bastards."

Sniffy likes the way this has turned. The cameraman is shuffling from foot to foot as if this is more documentary than he bargained for. Now for a little inflammatory rhetoric to nail it down. "Maybe you can con those egghead wimps at the Library Defense League," Sniffy sneers, "but the Chamber of Commerce is made of *real* men! Don't let these cheese-eaters push you around, General!"

At last Spittzler begins to look worried. "We are unarmed," he points out, raising his empty hands. "It is true that we are engaged in dialogue with other local factions. But the moral bullet can bring peace here. It can save your world!"

"The stars and stripes and a continent of kicked European asses will save the goddamn world!" Rockefeller shouts. "Forbes, collar these two loudmouth foreigners and throw their butts in the cell."

"Yes sir!" Forbes says gratefully.

Spittzler stiffens. "That would be foolish. What do you hope to accomplish?"

"I'm taking you hostage, for ransom," Rockefeller announces. "It's the only way to get any real use out of you sanctimonious bastards. Moral bullet, my ass!"

Forbes advances. Spittzler, still holding up empty hands, places his palms gently over his eyes. Andolini squeezes the video camera.

A blistering flash of white lightning sheets through the room.

Sniffy can't see anything.

"I'm blind!" Rockefeller howls. "Goddamnit, they've blinded me!"

There are long moments of frantic stumbling confusion and desperate cursing. At last a loud wooden thump. "I'm at the door, chief!" Forbes shouts. "They can't escape while I block this door!"

"That's great, Forbes. You're a smart sucker."

"Thanks, chief. I'm blind, though."

"Me, too," Sniffy says. Everything is a red fog, fading to black. He stumbles toward what he hopes is the center of the room, until he barks his shin against the box. He stoops, hauls out the machine-gun. He fumbles with the feed-cover, feeling for the ammunition belt. The smooth cartridges are as big as his thumb. Luckily, the belt-feed is already engaged. He backs away, feeling a surge of power like a coke high,

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suffused with supreme confidence, an edgy energy. "Say, chief," Sniffy says, "you were right. This baby hardly weighs a thing. How do you fire it?"

"Wait a sec, Sniff," Rockefeller says. "We don't even know the bastards are really in the room with us."

"Oh, they're here, all right," Sniffy says. "I can hear 'em snickering."

"You've never been exactly a crack shot, Sniffy. You have any idea what that thing in your hands can really do?"

"Not really, no. But I just found the trigger." Sniffy steps forward, tripping for a moment on the ammunition belt. He jerks up on the barrel, raises his voice. "Okay, you two. Give up or be cheesecloth." He laughs. "Swiss cheesecloth!"

No answer.

"You know I mean it!"

Nothing.

"Chief?" Forbes says quietly. He's closer than Sniffy expected, and off to the left. Sniffy had been sure Forbes was on his right. "I'm pretty sure I got this door blocked real good, but it may be the closet door, actually. I mean, maybe those two already snuck off."

"Yeah, or maybe they're gonna wrestle this gun right out of my hands, and cut loose on us with it," Sniffy says. "That's why I wanted to grab it first, right?"

"Great thinking, Sidney," Rockefeller says. "You always were clever."

Sniffy thinks furiously. They could try to yell for reinforcements, but then Spittzler would almost surely try to grab the gun.

"They could kill us easy while we're blind, and then blast their way out," Sniffy says. "I mean, wouldn't you?"

"Yeah," Rockefeller admits. "You bet I would. Especially now that you've pointed that possibility out to them, pal."

For the first time, Sniffy begins to feel panic. His knees get a little shaky. "They might be sneaking up on me right now!" he says, swinging the gun muzzle wildly. "What do I do?"

"I didn't really want to live forever," Rockefeller says. "But I'm damned if *they* will. I say cut loose and the hell with it."

"I think you should hold your fire," Forbes says. "Just keep the best grip on it you can, and yell for help."

Maybe, Sniffy realizes, he isn't as good at this as he thought. Despite its advanced design, the machine gun is getting heavy. His shoulders ache. The pistol grip feels slick in his hand. He can hardly get his fingers around it; it's too big for a kid. He listens. Is that the sound of a footstep on the rug?

What the hey. "I'm gonna give our audience a chance to decide," he says. "If we *have* an audience. I'm gonna count to ten . . ." ●

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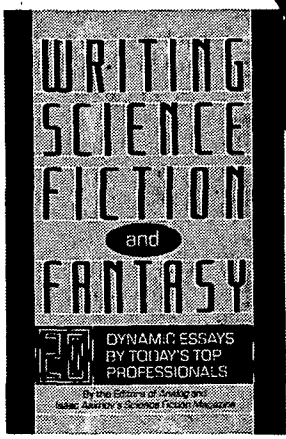

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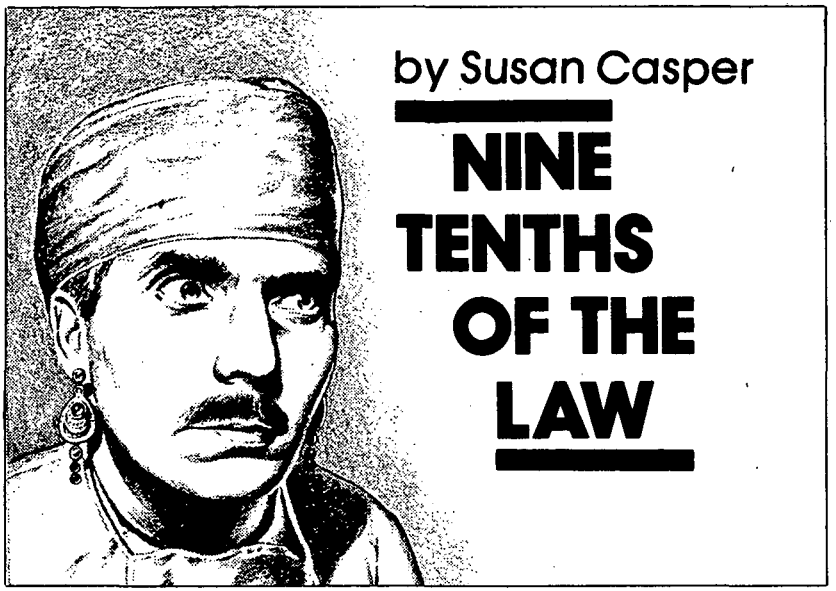

by Susan Casper

NINE TENTHS OF THE LAW

Susan Casper sold her first short story to the anthology *Fears*. Since then, her work has appeared in most of the major science fiction markets including *Playboy*, *F&SF*, and *Amazing*. Other anthology sales have included *In the Field of Fire* and *Blood is Not Enough*. "Nine Tenths of the Law" is her second tale for *IAsfm*.

Mrs. Birnbaum found herself looking down at her own body. She had read about things like that in *The National Enquirer*, and *The Star*, but she was never really sure that she believed everything she read in those newspapers. She felt the sudden urge to reach out toward herself and found that the arm stretched out in front of her was thick and muscular, covered in dark black hair. The nails on the hand were neatly clipped rather than sculpted. It was then that she glanced at herself. She was wearing surgical greens and her chest was actually flat enough to allow her to see her shoes—ugly affairs with gum soles and velcro closures. "Minor surgery. What could go wrong?" she wailed. To her horror, the words came out in a deep, masculine voice.

"Mike, pull yourself together," someone shouted. It took a moment for

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her to realize that he was talking to her. "There wasn't anything we could do." He reached out a hand in comfort.

"Mike-Schmike," she answered, pushing the offending hand away. "I don't know what you're talking about." She turned and marched out of the operating room.

Across the hall was a small, glassed-in area. She spotted her doctor, Dr. Sanderson, talking to her daughter, Sharon. The sound of his voice didn't reach her, but Sharon was in tears. How dare he upset the poor girl like that. Mrs. Birnbaum walked into the room

"I'm sorry," Dr. Sanderson was saying. "We didn't expect it. We don't know exactly what happened yet. There's always some risk involved in surgery. We did everything that we could."

"What are you telling her?" Mrs. Birnbaum asked. Before he could answer, Sharon leapt off the chair and threw her arms around Mrs. Birnbaum and began weeping piteously on her shoulder. "There, there," Mrs. Birnbaum said, patting her daughter's back. At least someone knew who she was.

"Oh, Mike," Sharon sobbed.

"Dr. Cohen, I'll leave her with you," Dr. Sanderson said.

"So what's this Dr. Cohen stuff?" she asked, looking around to see who else was there. The three of them were alone.

"Dr. Cohen, your humor seems very inappropriate," Dr. Sanderson said. At the same time, Sharon pulled back and said, "Mike?"

"Why does everyone keep calling me Mike Cohen? You know perfectly well that I," she said, puffing out her chest and putting her chin up, "am Reba Birnbaum. And you . . ." she added, turning on Sharon, "you ungrateful little girl. Denying your own mother. After all I went through for you. All the sacrifices. I carried you for nine months. Almost ten. You weren't an easy delivery, you know. I almost died."

Dr. Sanderson turned and stormed out of the room.

"Mother?" Sharon said, staring up at her quizzically. Her face was ashen.

"It's okay. Grab your coat. I'll explain everything in the car," Mrs. Birnbaum said, only what was there to explain? She had no idea herself what had happened. She took Sharon's hand and led her down the hall. "So where's your father?" she asked as they walked.

"He's home. He doesn't know yet," Sharon answered.

"Great! I'm dying and Nate's in bed watching football."

"That's not fair," Sharon snapped. "Mother told him not to come. I mean you told . . . I mean . . . oh, I'm so confused." She began to cry again.

"Stop that," her mother ordered. "Where did they put my coat?" She

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led Sharon to the elevator and pressed for the fifth floor. Her hospital room was 515. The door was closed and the little curtain drawn, but Mrs. Birnbaum paid no attention. She pushed the door open and dragged Sharon inside. A nurse was bending over the patient in bed A.

"You can't come in. . . . Oh, hello, Dr. Cohen," she said, the tone of her voice sweetening.

"You see what this boyfriend of yours is like at work," she called over her shoulder to Sharon. The girl needed a lot of looking after. Well, that was okay. She was here to look after her. "You have to keep an eye on these men or there's no telling what they might do." She had always kept a very good eye on Nathan . . . not that he'd ever done much, except lay on the couch and watch football. There was a cabinet on the window side, labeled B bed with sticky tape. She removed the bag with her clothing. Her good cloth coat was hanging on the hook. She took it and started to put it on. The sleeves were very tight, and, as she forced her arms into them, a distinct ripping sound was heard. Mrs. Birnbaum pulled off the coat and laid it over her shoulders. The nurse was staring at her, her mouth agape. "It's okay," Mrs. Birnbaum said. "I'll sew it when I get home."

Nathan Birnbaum, as expected, was lying in bed watching TV when his wife and daughter entered. "Is your mother out of surgery?" he asked Sharon.

"Oh, she's out all right," Sharon said, a little hesitantly.

"A lot you care," Mrs. Birnbaum said.

"Say, what are you doing in my bedroom?" Nathan shouted.

"*Your* bedroom? Well, I like that," Mrs. Birnbaum said, seating herself abruptly on the bed. She folded her arms across her chest and stared out the window, refusing to notice him.

"Dad," Sharon said, sitting beside him and taking his hand, "there's been a little problem."

"Problem?" he said. Mrs. Birnbaum turned to look at him. "Problem. Is she all right?"

"No, Dad. She isn't," Sharon said.

"Oh no. Oh, my Reba. My poor Reba. Is she . . ." Sharon nodded, then glanced at Mrs. Birnbaum and shrugged. Mr. Birnbaum began to cry. His wife softened. She got up and walked around the bed, pushed Sharon aside and took the place where she had been sitting. Nathan's head was in his hands. She put her arms around him and pulled his head to her chest.

"Shhh, shhh, it's okay," she said.

Nathan squirmed out of her arms, pushing her roughly away. "What do you think you're doing?" he asked.

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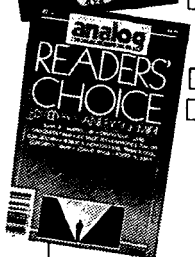

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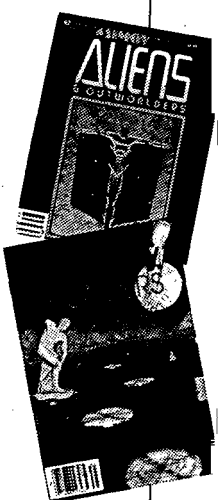

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"What do you mean, 'what am I doing?' I'm comforting you," she said.

"Well, stop it," he said.

"Nathan, I'm your wife," Mrs. Birnbaum said.

"You're not *my* wife, you little pervert," Nathan said. "Get the hell out of here."

"Well, I like that! After thirty years of marriage." Mrs. Birnbaum turned on her heel and stalked right out of the room.

The bathroom was a mess. Towels were strewn everywhere and the toothpaste had been left capless to drip on the sink. So this was how Nathan lived when he wasn't expecting her home. How like a man. She cleaned up the room, even before she looked herself over in the bathroom mirror. She did look a bit like Mike Cohen. What an ape. She wondered what it was that Sharon saw in him. Although, now that she got a real close look, he was much better looking than she had thought. Still, there would have to be changes made. She looked inside her mouth and examined the teeth. Not too many fillings. She seemed to be in good health. Well, that was a bonus. She ran her fingers through the short, dark, curly hair and wondered how long it would take it to grow. Nathan hated short hair, she knew.

Her bladder had behaved quite nicely. It had been several hours since she'd last had to pee. Still, she had learned, in those last days of her illness, to take advantage of such opportunities as they came to her. Old habits die hard. She examined the pants for a button and found instead a tie. How unusual. Sort of like Nathan's pajamas. She pulled the string and let them fall. The jockey shorts were tight, unlike Nathan's boxer shorts, but otherwise similar to her own baggy panties. She'd never seen a pair before, other than in advertisements. She pulled them down to her knees.

"Oh my," she said. And she had thought Nathan was well built. She wondered if Sharon knew. No, she decided. Not *her* daughter. Still, this was going to be a problem. In all her life she had never touched any organ but Nathan's. She certainly wasn't going to start now. Not even with her own. But how did one use it? She tried cautiously and found she could sit on the toilet and let it dangle into the bowl.

Sharon was sitting in the kitchen. The girl had her head on the table and was sobbing softly. Mrs. Birnbaum's heart went out to her. Poor thing. Always thinking of her mother. But how could Mrs. Birnbaum make the girl see that this wasn't such an awful thing? After all, look at the alternative. She could be lying dead on the operating table. She put a hand on the child's shoulder and stroked her hair. "It's okay, baby," she said. She helped Sharon up and gave her a hug. "Really. It's okay." Sharon pulled her head back and stared deeply into Mrs. Birnbaum's eyes. *She sees me*, Mrs. Birnbaum thought. *She alone, of all the people*

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in the world really sees me. The girl raised herself up on her tiptoes and kissed her. But wait. This was all wrong. Sharon was trying to stick her tongue in Mrs. Birnbaum's mouth. She pushed the child away.

"Ugh. That's disgusting," Mrs. Birnbaum said.

"I'm sorry," Sharon said. Her cheeks burned red.

"You should be. A nice girl like you. I didn't know you did things like that. You should be ashamed," Mrs. Birnbaum said.

"Mom," Sharon said, using the word as if she'd just learned it, "Where *is* Mike? Don't you think he might want to come back?"

"So who's stopping him?" Mrs. Birnbaum asked.

"You are, Mother," Sharon said. "You're using *his* body. You aren't supposed to be there. You're dead."

"Dead?" Mrs. Birnbaum said. "Of course I'm not dead. How can I be dead? I'm standing here, right in front of you."

"Yes, Mom, but you're standing there in Mike's body. Suppose he wants to use it?"

Nathan Birnbaum picked that moment to sweep into the room. "Are you still here?" he asked. "I thought you'd left. Sharon, are you aware that this boyfriend of yours is a little *faygeleh*?"

"Is he?" Mrs. Birnbaum asked. "How do you know? Maybe I won't let him come back after all."

"Daddy, what *are* you talking about?" Sharon asked.

"Just now, upstairs, when you left the bedroom . . . he tried to kiss me," Nathan said.

"Oh Nate, that was just me," Mrs. Birnbaum said.

"You see? He admits it!"

"Dad, go away for a while. I need to talk to Mike alone, please," Sharon said.

"Good. Give him what for," Mr. Birnbaum said. In a moment they could hear his footsteps on the carpeted stairs. It was only then that Sharon started talking.

"Mom, I love you. You've been a good mother, always. But this is Mike's body. Dad will never recognize you in it. Neither will the girls from Hadassah. None of your clothes will fit. Your jewelry would all look silly. Why, your ears aren't even pierced. You can't be Mrs. Reba Birnbaum in this body. It's the body of a young man. A doctor. You always wanted me to marry a doctor, didn't you?"

"Honey, I don't care who you marry, as long as he's a man who can make you happy. It's just that I thought a doctor, a lawyer, someone who makes good money, could, maybe, make you a little happier than anybody else."

"Mom . . . Mike makes me happy."

Mrs. Birnbaum looked thoughtful. There was something in what

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Sharon was saying. She'd look awfully silly in her furs like this. Nathan would be embarrassed to walk with her on his arm. True, her daughter still needed looking after, but Nathan was there. Maybe it was time to go. She took one last look at her house and her daughter, her prides and her joy. If this was the price of her daughter's happiness, who was she to deny her? "Okay," she said at last. "If that's what's best for you." She seated herself at the table and a moment later her eyes closed.

It wasn't a moment before they opened again. "Where the hell am I?" Mike said.

"You're at my house," Sharon answered. Her eyes were brimmed with tears, but she was smiling. "It's a long story, but I'll explain later."

"Oh, Sharon, your mother. I'm so sorry." He jumped up and took her in his arms and kissed her, and for quite a few moments they were much too busy to talk.

"Now that wasn't the least bit motherly," Sharon said at last.

By the day of the wedding, Sharon had almost convinced herself that the whole thing had never happened. Mrs. Birnbaum's funeral had been a lovely affair with all of her friends and family in attendance. Nathan took it well. Within months he was safely ensconced in a Florida condo, where he could watch ball games to his heart's content. The honeymooners landed in Hawaii without a hitch and attended a luau held in their honor. It had been a perfect day, and an even better night. The two lovers fell easily into an exhausted sleep.

That night, Mrs. Birnbaum sat up in bed. She looked over at Sharon sleeping next to her. There were some sacrifices a mother had to make for her children, and one of them was learning to share. Mike wouldn't mind. After all, half was better than none. Sharon might think she was all grown up, but you're never too old to need a mother's guidance. Mrs. Birnbaum smiled with satisfaction and softly patted her daughter on the back. "Now I can *really* keep an eye on you." ●

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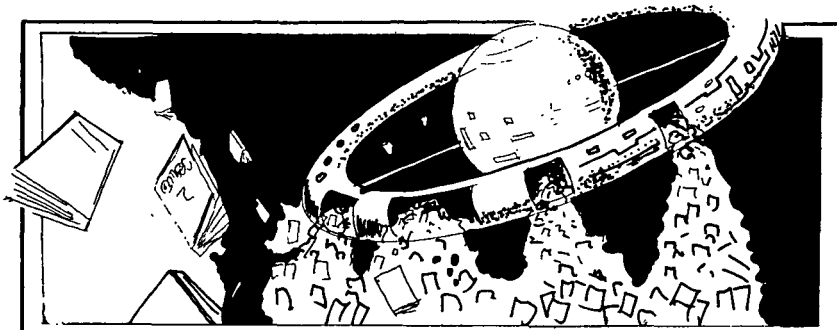

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WHAT EATS YOU

by Norman Spinrad

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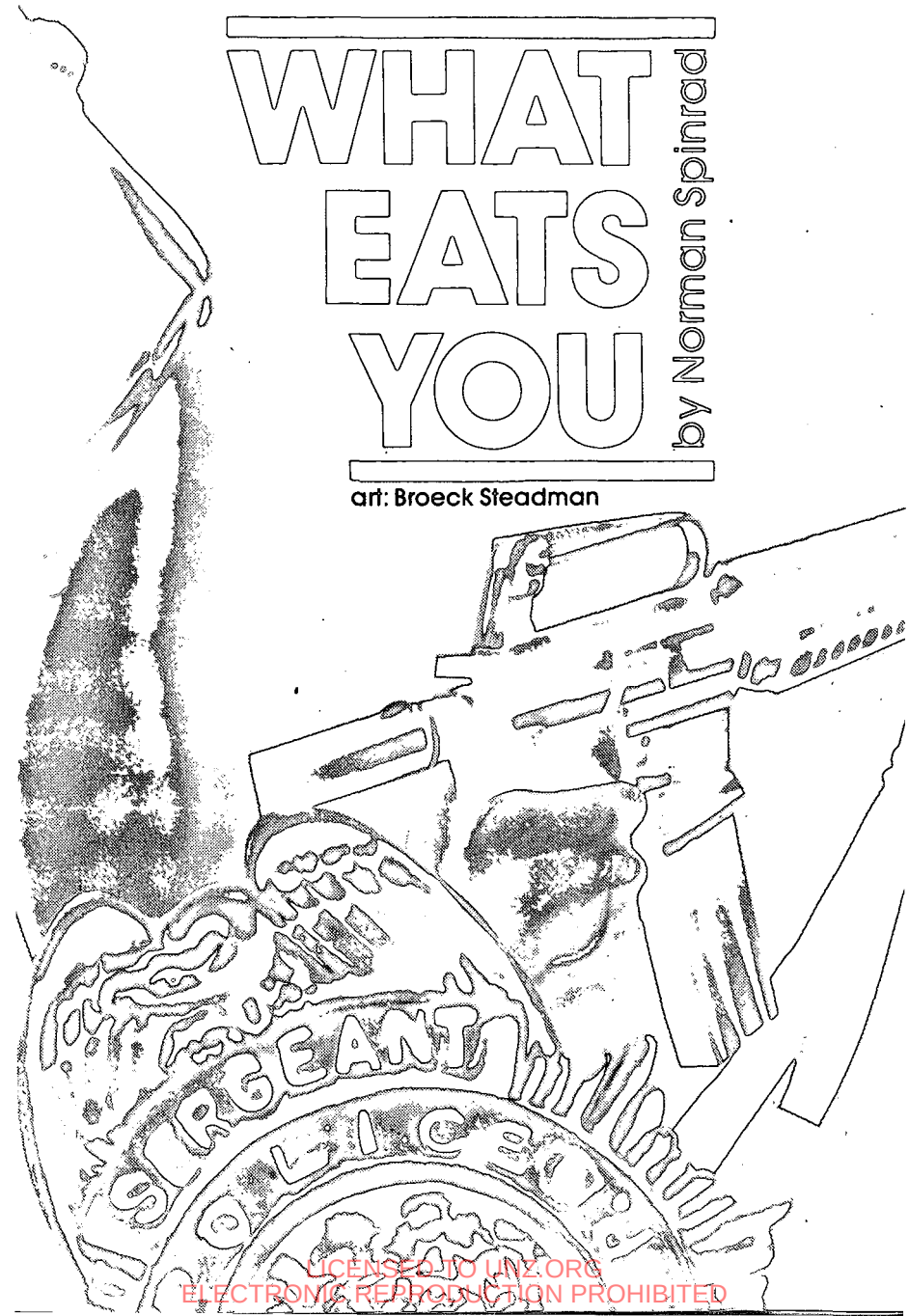

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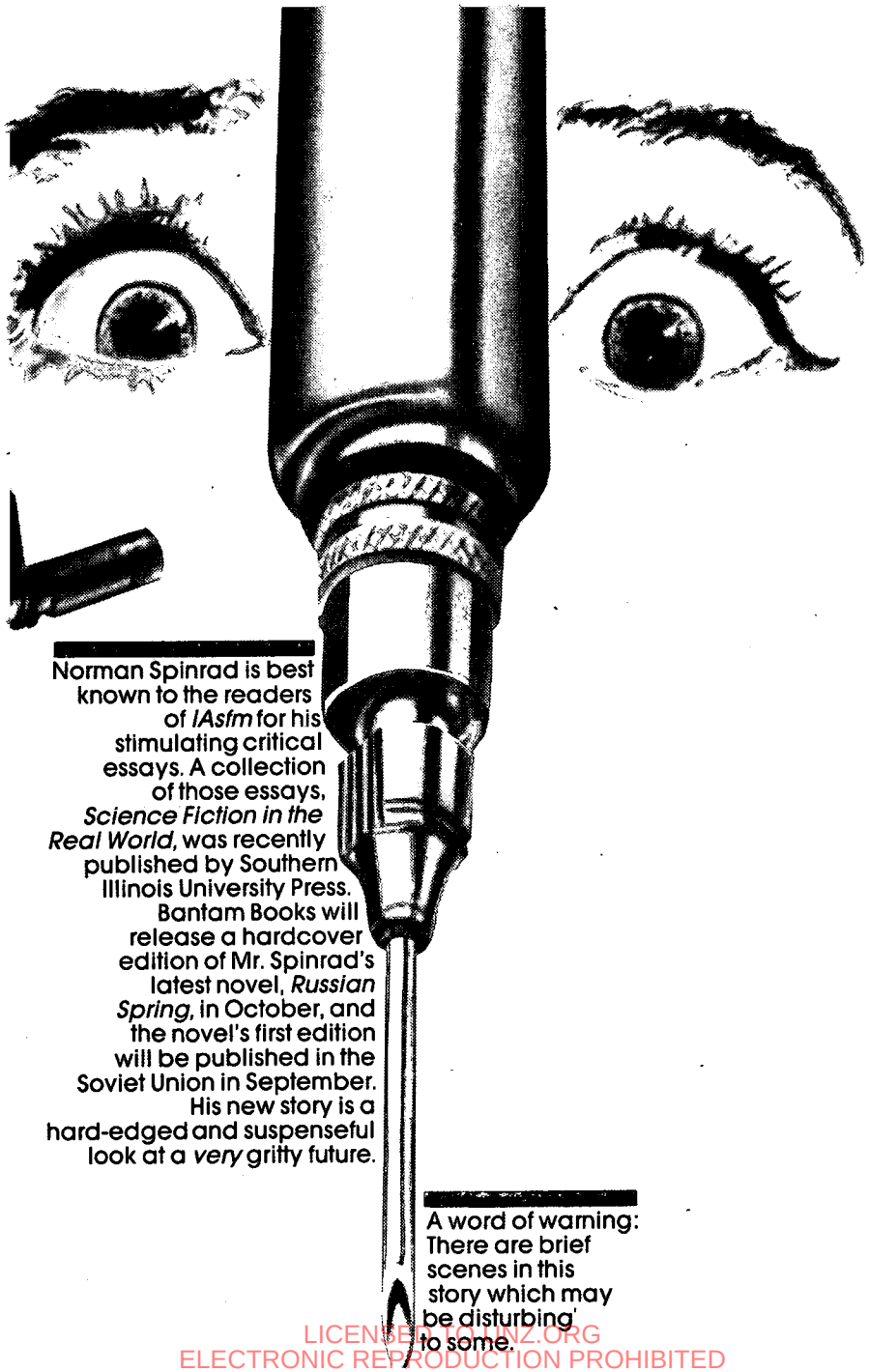

Norman Spinrad is best known to the readers of *IAsfm* for his stimulating critical essays. A collection of those essays, *Science Fiction in the Real World*, was recently published by Southern Illinois University Press. Bantam Books will release a hardcover edition of Mr. Spinrad's latest novel, *Russian Spring*, in October, and the novel's first edition will be published in the Soviet Union in September. His new story is a hard-edged and suspenseful look at a *very* gritty future.

A word of warning: There are brief scenes in this story which may be disturbing to some.

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This is the city. Los Angeles California. Seven million people. Some of them still choose to play what they were dealt. Too many of them don't. Sooner or later, some meme comes up jokers wild, and spreads like a locker-room fungus through the sweaty body politic. When it does, that's my job.

My name's Friday.

I'm a cop.

Joe Friday's the ideal meme for police duty. Never cracks a smile, never dips into the goods, John Q. Law himself, wouldn't dream of going native.

Not that more drastic tags haven't been tried, you understand.

Mike Hammer, for example, seemed just the meme to deal with Heavy Metal Ape when it hit the street, but things got a bit out of hand when LA's Finest took to blasting the solid citizens for jaywalking. After which, they put Roy Rogers and his faithful sidekick Doc Holliday in the black and whites, but they were forced to reconsider when those memes started acting like a two-gun Leather-Lizard and Nietzsche in Spurs and began cruising the meatrack on Selma.

"You are what you eat," the lieutenant assures the squad room, "this stuff comes straight from the LAPD vats, and the counter-pin is guaranteed to bring you down to your own beloved straight and narrow."

But the street knows better, and so do you, whoever you are at the time, once your own deck gets shuffled.

"You are what eats you," the dealer in the alley freely admits as he fans out his Baskin-Robbins pincushion for the delectation of the bad-ass masses.

The thing of it is, Mike the Hammer, no less than Mack the Knife, likes being out of the closet just fine, and has to be dragged kicking and screaming into the cop shop for his daily wipe.

For despite what both the lieutenant and the dealer may tell you, designing these tailored viruses is an art, not a science.

Which angel is dancing on the end of the pin you are holding? You gotta pay to see, and by that time, someone else is doing the looking. Some meme whose molecular hooks are mainlined to your pleasure-centers, guaranteed, therefore, if nothing else, to like its cerebral catbirdseat just fine.

That's the basic tech. That's the more or less standard core. Migrates through the bloodstream to the brain, penetrates the cells, maxes the endorphins, and multiplies.

Mr. Natural, as the dealers had it, was "you, only more so." Supercharged your brain chemistry, sped up your reflexes, turbocharged your sensory equipment, pumped out those endorphins, and one pin was all you would ever need to buy. Wouldn't you?

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Sure you did.

Not that the Chief Parker Porker adopted what you'd call a laid-back attitude at the time. As was traditional, the chief of the LAPD was planning on a losing run for statewide office on the usual Attila the Hun platform, and Mr. Natural was the perfect paranoid foil, Willy Horton on a pin.

Not that there was nothing to be paranoid about. "Garbage in, garbage out," the old hackers had it, back when software was the outlaw cutting edge. But software runs on hardware, and when you pump a tagless eptifier virus through the old cerebral meatware, what you get out the other end is indeed what the dealer promises, "you, only more so."

And if "you" is a snatch-and-grab artist, a mugger, a Blood, a Crip, or just generalized street-scurve, "only more so" will not exactly fit the ideal profile of the solid citizen.

So what the LAPD found itself confronting was an epidemic of Rambos on methedrine, Supermen mainlining the dark side of the Force, turbocharged sex maniacs, and traffic scofflaws with the reflexes and road manners of Aryton Senna turning the freeways and streets into World War Grand Prix.

Not to mention the warm sense of security the situation instilled in the electorate. But mention it loudly and often, our would-be Senator Porker sure as deficits and taxes did.

Several police chiefs in jackboots ago, the LAPD was being castigated as usual for excessive resort to gunplay, forcing the yahoo in charge at the time to defend his ammo budget before the City Council. "You say my boys are firing too many rounds?" he told them. "No problem. Just issue us dum-dum bullets. One shot'll blow the miscreants to dogmeat. We'll be able to take out twice the bad guys with half the slugs, or you don't have to support my campaign for Lieutenant Governor!"

"Duh," the City Council replied after arduous deliberation, "that makes sense," and they did it.

Memes, as we all now know, are software personality patterns moving through the cerebral hardware, but we tend to forget that there were plenty of the wild variety loose in the psychic gene pool long before the black hats in the white coats figured out how to tag their own tailored versions to your basic viral brain-bug.

The Parker meme had inhabited several generations of police chiefs already, and the Councilman meme hadn't mutated much since Sam Yorty wrote the tag, so when the chief Porker demanded Mr. Natural for the Forces of Law and Order, they gave him that too.

Things did indeed stabilize at a higher level of frenzy, which is to say that while the body-count soared, the LAPD was at least able to improve

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its give-get ratio back up to the figure it had long maintained, plus or minus three percent.

Then some smart guy started tagging the bugs. There is some dispute as to what hit the market first—Rambo, Macho Man, Heavy Metal Ape—but no disputing that it came out of the black labs of the big-time dealers, not the Pentagon or the CIA, as the flaggies have it.

From their bottomline point of view, Mr. Natural was a terrible product. One sale, and you've permanently lost another consumer. Is this any way to run the Dope Business?

'Course not. What was needed was a marketing device for causing the happily infected client to buy another pin. And another and another. Necessity being the mother of invention, sooner or later someone would develop the tech to tag the bugs on the pins.

"You, only more so?" the dealers were now able to ooze. "Why settle for that? Why not be just what you want to be? And if you're too stupid or brainburned to figure out what that is, hey, no problem, buy yourself one of these pins and have some fun with your new head. What've you got to lose? If you don't like you, why I'll just sell you another, and another, and another until you find your very own personal blue max."

Once the stuff hit Hollywood, where there are several thousand TV writers out of work at any given time, it was inevitable that the bug business become showbized, with tag-hacks churning out sleazoid dreamselves faster than the techs could hang them on the cores. TV being what it is, these memes were not exactly subtle, Proust not being the fave of your average street person, and the writers of the tags being of the sort who believed Moby Dick was a venereal disease.

The rest is what's left of history, that is after the inevitable Parker Center request for tailored police personalities was met with the inevitable City Council jawohl.

Someone remembers the days when he walked into the squad-room not knowing who he would be next when he hit the street. They were trying everything in those days. Mike, Roy, the Doc, the Duke, Kojak, Wyatt, Sonny, Sergeant Preston, and who remembers what all else.

Who indeed?

Certainly not Joe Friday. Just the facts, ma'am. My name's Cop and I'm a friday, and what a relief! My cool blue blood becomes almost tepid when I think of what my current corpus performed when those Hollywood concepts were popping the synapses. I am sorely tempted to drown my shame in chocolate milk shakes when one of those old cop shop engrams backflashes to pollute memory's vital cerebral fluids.

Doc Holliday's idea of crowd control was the shoot-out at the OK Corral, Mike Hammer was severely remiss in reading perpetrators their mir-

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andas before breaking their kneecaps, and even good old Duke saw nothing un-American in blasting whatever disturbed his momentary peace.

It was a process of elimination, of which there was plenty at the time, but now my name's Friday, and I'm the cop, and so is any of LA's Finest you'll encounter on the street. If Joe Friday becomes really cross, he may subject you to an earnest moral lecture for three minutes of dead air, but that's better than having Mike Hammer crack you over the head with a bottle of Jack Daniels, now isn't it, ma'am?

We were working the night watch out of the bionarcotic division. The boss is the usual would-be Lieutenant Governor in mirror-shades. My partner's Joe Friday, who else?

A new drac shop appeared to be operating somewhere in the twilight zone between Hollywood and East LA, and the town had good reason to be nervous.

Whereas your professional illegal pinproducer is a heavily bankrolled manufactory with top of the line equipment and a payroll rich with techs and tag writers, your drac shop is strictly a sleazoid shoestring operation run by the brainburned remains of the clientele.

Their equipment is what they have managed to steal from forces that would gleefully vaporize them in the event of repossession, installed in a cellar that had last seen non-rodential habitation during the administration of Governor Moonbeam.

Unequipped financially and mentally for the coherent production of molecular software, these zombies pirate existing memes by jabbing pins into the buttocks of random samples of the street life, recombining them with an eggbeater, and dealing the resulting sludge as the product.

The first subtle hint that a drac shop was in operation occurred when a man wearing black leather and chrome chainmail and sporting a row of antique single-edged razor blades epoxied down the midline of his shaven skull entered a Ralph's supermarket on Sunset, armed with an Uzi and a large samurai sword. After beheading a security guard, the manager, and three check-out clerks, and blasting a random number of patrons, he persuaded the survivors to donate the contents of the tills to the cause.

By this time, however, the disturbance had attracted official attention, and when the perpetrator emerged into the parking lot, he was met by a SWAT team that had been airlifted to the scene under orders to take the specimen alive. This they accomplished by immediately shattering his kneecaps with dum-dum rounds.

Downtown, under the influence of scopolamine, biofeedback devices, and the usual rubber hoses, the suspect identified himself as Satan, but could be induced to supply no further useful information.

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Eighteen hours later, a female suspect was arrested on the corner of Hollywood and Vine biting the heads off a sackful of kittens and spitting them at passing pachucowagons. She was stark naked, smeared with peanut butter and blood, and it took twelve officers to finally subdue her.

Soon thereafter, a squad of Hari Krishnas armed with chainsaws and baseball bats, led by a beastie boy who had doused himself with blue wall-paint and declared himself Shiva, invaded the Scientology Center on Hollywood Boulevard. Order was only restored after a Tac Squad mini-copter landed on the roof and flushed the building with barf gas.

When the boys in the lab ran the gray matter of these perpetrators through their cyberscopes, the report was somewhat disturbing.

The tags were the usual drac shop mulligan stew of pirated material unable to cohere into any meme capable of sustaining a consistent control of the organism, resulting in a creature running off something close to synaptic static, like the Disneyland Abe Lincoln with a track redone by William Burroughs.

The viral core that they were using, however, would have been a matter for the FBI or more drastic federal agencies had Parker Center been willing to share turf with the wimps from Washington. How had some sleazoid drac shop gotten its greasy tentacles on a piece of military brainware?

Stupid question.

They happened to stick one of their pins in the ass of someone carrying it. Some spook on assignment gets pinned on the escalator at the Beverly Center. A Secret Service agent gets sampled on crowd control duty without ever knowing it. Some Marine commando goes AWOL for a weekend of booze and hookers and they get him in the toilet.

By whatever means, the pilfered viral core, which this drac shop was draping its putrid molecular goo all over, was a heavy-duty military virus, designed to be employed short term in combat situations. It disconnected the pain centers, and cranked metabolism, reflexes, and sensory neurons up over the top into redline to produce a military unit capable of walking through walls on overdrive for about two hundred hours before exhausting its protoplasmic resources.

In approved military usage, this core would be tagged with an appropriate military meme depending upon rank and mission. Hornblower, Flynn, or Lee for inspiring command personnel, G.I. Joe and the Green Beanie for the loyal spearcarrying gunfodder. The command meme would run along the mission's prime directive, and the troops saw themselves as heroic sons of future gold star mothers.

Without a military tag to civilize it, however, this core produced something like a Viking berserker on angel dust, a superhuman organism running on the decidedly subhuman random backbrain software.

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Worse still, the drac shop sleazoids were tagging this core with a mixmasterblend of recombined memes chopped from choice samples generally obtained from human pincushions.

Subsequent events were less than reassuring. Someone dressed like a black leather Spiderman scampered up to the top of the Capitol Records building to the amazement of the rubberneckers and then swandived off into their midst, leaving a rather gory impact crater. A transvestite resembling a prehistoric Wonder Woman hijacked a gasoline truck and drove it sailing off the Santa Monica interchange ramp and onto the southbound San Diego.

Thus far those were the only occurrences that fit the M.O.

That was the good news. At least for the moment, it seemed that these amateurs didn't know what they had, or if they did, none of the heavy players had yet expropriated their assets. Meaning we still had time to bust the operation before the inevitable happened.

The bad news was what would happen if we didn't. From a professional police point of view, this pin might be nightmare alley, but from the point of view of the smart money dealers, this would be fat city. All they'd have to do was strip this mess down to the military core, tag it with memes like Heavy Metal Ape, Dead Army Faction, and Mike Fink, and they'd have a pin every bad-ass barroom bully and dimwitted professional perpetrator would be clamoring to pop. That the clientele would be braindead a few days later was a health warning not likely to be prominently featured on the package.

There are some bad people out there, mister. That's why God invented cops. Think about it.

Someone downtown surely did, after which the word from Parker Center came down to the squad-room that unless this operation were terminated before Federal agents had to be included in on the fun, the Chief Porker would accede to the wishes of the citizenry to appoint a more drastic police meme to replace Sergeant Friday. Say, Heinrich Himmler, Bull Conner, or Guardian Angel.

"If this drac shop isn't busted by next Sunday, Friday, you'll find yourself not finding yourself at all," was the gist of it.

Well Joe Friday's only a human meme, ma'am, not without the software for a sense of self-preservation, besides being tormented from time to time with backflash dopplegangers from the previous unsavory inhabitants, leaving no desire to be replaced by even more trigger-happy updates of same.

So the Fridays of the force did what we knew best.

We set up a dragnet.

Stake-outs. Interviews with snitches. Tailing bad guys. Sooner or later

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we'd get a tip that led somewhere. Or bust the right guy. Or find ourselves another drac shop demon to catch.

Believe me, even Joe Friday didn't care to contemplate that. Good team-playing cop that I am, I had no desire for the glory of that particular collar. Let a colleague have that honor, preferably one well-ensconced in an armored personnel carrier at the time.

It didn't come down that way.

Just the facts, ma'am.

We were cruising down Hollywood Boulevard several carlengths behind a known dealer whose neon-framed Excalibur did not exactly hinder our surveillance. Being a Thursday night, the traffic moved freely and the sidewalks were pretty quiet, meaning that aside from the usual contingents of Cleopatras in Furs, Leather Lizards, and Mutant Teenage Surfer Nazis, nothing much of professional interest was eventuating.

That is until my partner called my attention to events transpiring in the shadow of a closed taco stand on the corner of Las Palmas. A blonde-maned surfer boy in denim cut-offs had flung a hooker up against the shutters and was in the process of sinking his teeth into her shoulder.

"What do you think, Joe?"

"Looks suspicious to me."

"Better check it out," I decided, unshipping the General Dynamics over and under that had replaced the traditional repeating twelve-gauge for the duration. This weapon gave you the option of a taser capable of rendering a gorilla neuronically incapable, or explosive rounds fired semiautomatically for reducing elephants to hamburger. Good-cop, bad-cop, in one plastic and titanium package.

"Los Angeles Police Department, sir," I announced clearly, firing a taser-dart into the suspect's left buttock. The volts in the wire should have felled the Mighty Hulk, but the suspect seemed not to even notice till I turned the rheostat up to levels whose non-lethality was not covered in the manufacturer's warranty.

At which point, he dropped his victim, and came for me spitting blood. My partner tased him in the neck, and our combined current sufficed to immobilize the perpetrator, which was to say he stood there frozen and vibrating but still wouldn't go down.

"You are under arrest, you have the right to remain silent . . . " I proceeded to miranda him while my partner summoned an ambulance for the hooker.

The suspect was a blond male Caucasian. He was wearing a pair of cut-off Lee Wranglers. Distinguishing marks included a tattoo of Elvis on his chest, a beercan tab nose-ring, and a mouthful of filed teeth.

"Fits the MO, Joe. Better take him downtown."

Conveying the suspect to the car proved to be something of a logistical

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problem. Our tasers seemed to have enough juice together to keep him immobilized, but neither of us was willing to risk the physical contact implied in a manual bring-along.

"Better call for some back-up, Joe. Maybe the crane helicopter?"

"I've got a better idea, Joe," I told him, ever so slowly turning down my taser's power. "Maybe we can walk this zombie back along the pinline if we're careful."

The suspect's bloodshot eyes appeared to regain some focus. His facial muscles twitched and wriggled and he staggered a step forward. I eased off the juice just a tad more.

"What about it, fella?" I encouraged him. "Things could go a lot easier for you if you cooperate."

"Human blood I eat your heart out with animal teeth!"

"Bad attitude, mister," I told him, turning the current up.

"A real wise-guy, isn't he, Joe?"

"Let's have some I.D." I said, easing off again.

Maybe it was just random sequences firing, or maybe there was still some sort of substrate left capable of replying to interrogation in a crude manner.

"DRACULA! VAMPIRE KING OF THE HEAVY METAL SWAMPIT SUPERMARKET! SURF'S UP IN TRANSSEXUAL TRANSYLVANIA TONIGHT!"

"Dracula, eh? Well, you be a good boy, Count, and we'll let you walk us back to your coffin. Otherwise, it'll be flaming garlic toast under your fingernails in the dawn's early light."

Pigeons have no more functional forebrain than the suspect in question, yet they can be motivated by simple systems of reward and punishment. So, with our taser darts firmly implanted in his flesh, and a long series of negative reinforcements, we were able to establish a certain limited control of the suspect.

Just doing the job, mister. Or would you rather have pit bulls with rubber hoses?

"Where'd you get the pin, fella?" I inquired, backing off the juice.

"Little lives, master, possums, bollweevils, high strung waitresses on roller skates, meat for the monster, go forth and multiply by my dawn's early bite!"

Zap.

"Razor-blade twinkies made me do it!"

Zap.

While no one of significant coherence might be in the driver's seat, data, it would seem, still persisted. And, with the meme-fragments scrambled into random connectivity with same, each momentary current spike was sufficient to release a new burst from somewhere.

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Sort of like flipping through sixty-five channels of cable TV with a remote in search of a weather report, ma'am. Sometimes police work is just three yards and a cloud of dust, mister.

"Gulag Girls Go Gonzo! Sex Slaves of the Ayatollah! Vampire Zombie Sweathogs from Outer Space!"

"Hold it, Joe, don't change that channel!"

"Got something?"

"Triple feature this week at the Sexray Cinema on Western, Joe. Saw it on my way to the malt shop."

It might not be much to go on, but it was the only lead we had. We tase-marched Count Dracula into the squad car, and drove down to Western, a non-yuppified slice of borderland Hollywoodiana given over to Turkish taco stands, Korean falafel joints, all-night dealerships for junk-food junkies, beer bars featuring gynecological exhibitions, and porn movie houses.

If lalaland had had railroad tracks, this would have definitely been on the other side of them.

The suspect, however, was observed to respond with enthusiasm to what appeared to be familiar haunts. "Double cheese, no anchovies, and light on the fish sauce," he shouted out the window at a passing Cambodian pizzeria.

He became maniacally agitated when we parked across Western from the Sexray Cinema. His eyes rolled, drool frothed, and he started thrashing around on the seat to the point where a higher increment of current was necessary to subdue him.

"Home is the horror to the land of the free and the tube of the grave! Little cockroach lives slithering through the tulips! Please, sir, I'd like another!"

The Sexray Cinema, open all night, three continuous XXX-rated features and a classic Cuban Superman short, had a worn marquee sign strobing the panic frequency in purple neon, and had been painted a pale pastel pink in a previous century. Its soggy crumbly stucco walls were encrusted with graffiti featuring mutated speedfreak splatterporn and obscene observations in fourteen different languages, none of which will ever be identified.

"What now, Joe, stake out?"

I checked my watch. "Only two hours to the end of shift. You know how the accountants downtown have been getting about unauthorized overtime. Won't even cover the donuts."

"Guess we better check it out, then. What about the Count?"

It seemed questionable police procedure to enter the premises impeded by the suspect. We would be unable to use our tasers, since any additional drain on the circuitry presently preventing him from devouring the near-

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est available protoplasm would result in his sure to be unfortunate release.

We resolved the dilemma by hotwiring the Count to the cigarette lighter. There should be more than enough juice in the battery to hold him till the end of the shift.

Not having either warrants or probable cause, we were forced to pay our way inside, and had considerable difficulty obtaining expense account receipts for the misers in accounting from the clerk in the armored ticket booth, an African American individual about the size and demeanor of a lobotomized rhinoceros, who smashed out our change on the counter to the jungle beat of his own distant drummer.

The lobby was lit by a single blacklight floodlamp recycled from a hippie motif bordello. The only snack remaining in the abandoned refreshment stand was half a popcorn machine full of unpopped cockroaches drowned in rancid oil. From the dark stairwell leading down to the toilets came a ripe aroma of long-dead urine and undead jockstraps.

Muffled grunts and unspeakable slobberings were to be dimly heard from the sound track of the feature playing inside, but exposure to anything seemed preferable to checking out the creatures in the green latrine.

We climbed a flight of darkened stairs through a chittering of animal life, and entered the balcony section. On the frayed and gray-streaked screen, organs pounded away in close-up, and half a dozen bagmen shamblers scattered about the seats did likewise under their peacoats.

We made our way to the front row, took seats, and peered down into the orchestra. The audience below consisted of about thirty similar individuals, perhaps half of them conscious. Occasional sweaty murmurs and unwholesome gruntings were to be heard, but the subjects appeared peaceful and engaged in no unlawful activity.

"What now, Joe?"

"Wait for the floor show."

We sat through the end of *Gulag Girls Go Gonzo*. Ten minutes into *Vampire Sweathogs from Outer Space,* half a dozen shadowy figures slithered into the orchestra from the rear and began pinning the audience.

"It's going down!"

"Let's bust 'em!"

We dashed up to the exit and into the descending stairwell, where by that time the rats and the roaches were screaming ultrasonic counterpoint to the hideous sounds erupting from the orchestra, baffled by the intervening masonry into something no more feral than happy-hour at the wolverine farm.

We hit the lobby just as the last of the drac squad disappeared into

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the dark at the bottom of the toilet stairs. The thought of descending into the anal pit of Calcutta after them did little to encourage devotion to duty.

I checked my watch. Fifty-one minutes to the end of the shift. Maybe they would be better spent handing out parking tickets on Wilshire?

"ANIMAL EYEBALLS BOILED IN BLOOD!"

"I AM THE MAGGOT MAN!"

"PEOPLE TO THE POWER OF THE IRON SEX MACHINE!"

"SUCK CHICKEN GUTS!"

The recombined contents of the Sexray Cinema erupted, screaming, gibbering, and tearing at each other, into the lobby, pallid porn theater slugs transformed into a herd of blood-crazed Godzillas. They smashed the refreshment stand glass to shards, bashed open the popcorn machine and began shoveling the contents into their drooling yawps, mewling and snarking in a most unseemly manner as Brownian movement carried them in the general direction of lalaland's tender streets.

Discretion at once became the mother of valor, as *our* decidedly more focused motion carried us speedily down the toilet stairs out of sight. There are times when it makes good sense to trade a terminal headache for an upset stomach.

A naked 40 watter illuminated the hallway, barely bright enough to reveal the smashed pay-phones and the mummified cat crucified to the men's room door with hypodermic needles. Beneath the ladies' room door, a line of flickering pale yellow light revealed the likely presence of the perpetrators.

Gingerly, I tested the door with my shoulder. "It's locked."

"By the book, Joe?"

"What else?"

We trained our General Dynamics over and unders on the offending door. "Los Angeles Police Department," I announced, rapping on it smartly, "open up in the name of the law!"

When that evinced nothing but clearly uncooperative growlings from within, we stepped back a few paces, and fired two explosive rounds at more or less point-blank range.

The door exploded inward in a cloud of flying flinders and cordite smoke, behind the cover of which we entered the premises.

"Freeze!"

"You are under arrest."

"You have the right to remain silent . . . "

"You have the right to counsel . . . "

The toilet stall doors had been torn from their hinges. The apparatuses jury-rigged around them and the clotted yellowish sludge within gave

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significant circumstantial evidence that the toilet bowls were being used as the bug-vats.

Indeed, a white male individual clad only in jockey-shorts and a Dodgers cap reversed into catcher's position was in the act of plunging a meaty fistful of pins into one of them.

There were six other suspects present. An African-American male in a bloodied Hari-Krishna robe and jackboots. A Leather-Lizard with a Philip's head screwdriver messily forced through his left earlobe. A Hollywood Boulevard Cowboy sucking avidly on the neck of a decapitated pigeon. An individual wearing only the mangy top half of a cut-rate gorilla suit. Something enormous covered with hair, beard, and plastic laundry bags, clutching a baseball bat studded with razor blades.

Seated in half-lotus position on the urine-stained white tile and surrounded by ragged slabs of old styrofoam packing well porcupined with pins, was a skeletal creature with eyes like flying saucers and graying dreadlocks into which the tails of decomposing rats had long since been woven. He wore a grimy Bart Simpson T-shirt over whose illo "Charlie Lives!" had been crudely scrawled with blood. His scrawny legs and sinewy arms were crisscrossed with what appeared to be pins of the product.

"Welcome to the Darwinian Monkeyhouse of the Iron Scream!" he gibbered at us, jamming another pin into his buttock.

"What you think, Joe?"

"Looks like the Big Enchilada to me."

"I am the Children of the Night!"

"Sure you are, fella," I said, whipping out the cuffs.

"Backdoor man! The people eat what the rats don't understand!"

"You can tell us all about it downtown, mister."

"Helter skelter, me hearties! Suck pig blood!" he screamed, grabbing up a fistful of pins, and jabbing them down on the top of his head.

They came for us, whipping out rusty bowie knives, longshoremen's hooks, crowbars, broken Perrier bottles, half a ton of raw red meat and more, shambling, staggering, tripping, and leaping toward us with unambiguous unlawful intent.

No unnecessary rounds were fired. We had probable cause to assume arrest was being resisted, Lieutenant, it's all in the report.

No illegal product endorsement is implied, ma'am, but a word must be said for the efficacy of the General Dynamics over and under in this tactical field situation.

The Leather-Lizard exploded into an airborn cloud of McDonald's finest. Gorilla-suit lurched forward several steps after his head was blown against the toilet wall before falling to the floor, twitching, jerking, and fountaining gore. Hari the Krishna achieved sushi satori in mid-mantra.

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The Hollywood Cowboy made Hamburger Heaven. I caught the Dodger fan as he cleared the stall and blew his midsection back into the toilet bowl.

The laundry bag monster, however, had removed the top of my partner's skull with his razor-studded baseball bat, and was rooting around in the cranium with his tongue and fingers.

No one likes a cop-killer, mister, and the failure by the courts to employ the gas chamber in such cases as God intended discourages excessive restraint in such circumstances, ma'am. It's all in the report, Lieutenant. I inserted the barrel of my weapon between the cheeks of his buttocks and blew his ass off.

The toilet was choked with chemical smoke. Finely divided globules of blood were still in the process of precipitating from the First Stage Smog Alert atmosphere. The room reverberated like the inside of a Jamaican steel drum. Assorted body-parts spurted and spasmed in ichorous red pools. Brains and intestines oozed down the walls.

The suspected ringleader still sat there jabbing fistfuls of pins into his anatomy and gibbering incoherently, apparently indifferent to the remains of his colleagues oozing down his corpus like Heinz extra-thick.

Disgust you to see it, Lieutenant, but it was the only collar in town, and there was no one else to make it.

The cuffs were definitely contraindicated, seeing as how the suspect's fists were waving several dozen assorted free samples of the pins that had precipitated this police action. I therefore maintained an appropriate distance and fired a taser dart into his solar plexus.

I cranked up the juice to a poleax level in order to render the suspect comatose while I returned to the squad car to secure meatwagon and back-up, but he didn't pass out. Instead, his eyes began to roll asynchronously, random muscles twitched and jerked as he continued to rave.

"Pins to the pimples of the graveyard lizardware! I call upon the recombined orgone-grinder monkeys of the black hole machine to think of it as evolution in action!"

With every few phonemes, the suspect's voice shifted timbre, tone, volume, rhythm and backbeat, producing an effect like a gabbling multitude of slavering maniacs injected with random phonograph needles.

No doubt this was precisely the nature of the beast, its meatware thoroughly infected with fragmented and recombined memes to the point that the only operating system on the motherboard was the voice from the neuronic whirlwind popping random synapses to the bass-track.

Nevertheless, it occurred to me that some coherent statement might be obtained from the suspect by employing the method used to interrogate the Count. Since he *had* been read his mirandas, testimony acquired thusly should be admissible in court.

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"All right, fella, want to tell me all about it?" I said, zapping him a charge of current that sent smoke steaming out of his ears. "I can't promise you a rose garden, but it'll look better in court if the report says you were cooperative."

"The enemy of order is chaos! Do my own thing! Let your memes do the walking to the music of Beelzebub's collective spheres! Bow down to Elvis!"

"You trying to tell me that this is all just another lalaland nut-cult, mister?"

"We made the Devil do it! The Force is with us! Think of it as evolution's sausage machine in action!"

"Don't hand me that Prigogenetic poppycock, fella," I told him, dealing him another zap. "Don't give me that guff about higher consciousness emerging from the reshuffling of the neuronic Mandlebrot set, I'm a professional police officer, mister, and I've heard it all before."

Of course I had. From every low-life pin-pusher trying to cop a plea as evolution's secret agent. Only doing my job, officer. You can't make an evolution without cracking a few thousand-year-old eggs!

I have even heard such street-scurve presume to suggest that Joe Friday himself is merely a meme with a badge and a billyclub maintaining an uneasy order in the brain-pans of a police force whose meatware has been thoroughly saturated with the remains of previous personality programs.

"Mike the Hammer, Wyatt the Kid, Bull Tracy, and the whole superhuman Porker Palace crew's ghosting your machine, Friday," one of these miscreants once had the temerity to taunt me before being silenced with a short sharp shock. "The police finds its own usages."

Still, there was something about his M.O. that seemed to require further investigation. The suspects had been observed pinning the patrons in the orchestra without the transfer of greenbacks. Was this any way to run a pin-pushing operation? Don't get your patriotic genes in an uproar, mister, but it appeared to be, well, communistic.

"You wouldn't be some kind of bolshevistic secret agent polluter of our vital cerebral fluids out to reduce the body politic to a thin lumpenproletarian gruel for your secret masters in the Pavlov Institute, would you fella?" I inquired, giving him a jolt that sent his flesh doing the St. Vitus shuffle and sped the turntable of his babbling up to a shrill syncopated 78.

"Be what eats you only more so vampire doughboys of the dawn's early fright I sing the Batman ubermensch in a tasty brain-candy sugar coating! All your life you have always waited for this moment to arrive!"

Certainly not *that* moment, mister, as something grabbed me from

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behind and, grunting and drooling, sank its fangs into the back of my neck.

"It will only hurt for a thousand years of red hot claws," the dracmeister promised, "and then—Eternal Knife!"

I whirled clockwise, yanking my neck out of the offending choppers at the cost of a greedy gobful of my own personal protoplasm, bringing around my General Dynamics over and under to effect terminal police procedure.

"LITTLE KILLS MASTER! ONE BITE MAKES ME LARGER ONE BITE MAKES YOU CRAWL! BUT THE BRAINS THAT MOMA GIVES YOU UP AGAINST THE WALL!"

No doubt some grease monkey in the motorpool had slipped a reconditioned offbrand under the squad car's hood again in place of the heavy duty all-weather battery the specs clearly call for. The unfortunate result now stood before me with ire in his eyes and my blood on his lips, and I was going to have to jump-start the vehicle now too. Penny-wise, and pound foolish, Lieutenant.

Reaching for me again was the Count, released from the electronic lock-up of the cigarette lighter by the battery's demise, drooling ruddy gobbets of my own USDA Prime, and clearly evincing further harmful intent at the top of his lungs.

Even as I pulled the trigger, I realized that my motion had pulled the taser wire of my weapon free of the dracmeister's flesh, but by that time, Friday seemed to have vacated, thanks to the venomous pins the Count had sunk into my tender meat.

Just the facts, ma'am. The recombined contents of the toilet bowls dripping from the Count's fangs had mutated into something vampirically infectious.

As the Count exploded into gazpacho, I felt the sting of multiple insect bites on my back. Reaching back, I yanked out a handful of pins.

Even as I did, I felt another fusillade, and turning, I caught more pins smack in the kisser from the handfuls that the only warm body remaining was flinging at me with both fists.

"NOW IS THE TIME FOR THE DARING SHARING! THIS LITTLE PIGGIE GOES TO MARKET THE JUNK BONDS OF THE LIVING DEAD! THINK OF IT AS VAMPIRE BRAIN-BATS IN ACTION!"

I don't know who came over me, ma'am. Whoever it was seemed quite cross, mister, not without probable cause, you understand, Lieutenant.

"Thank you, sir, but I just gave at the office," I told him, "though now that you mention it, I wouldn't mind a hot meal."

So saying, I kicked the perpetrator in the groin, while delivering a roundhouse right to his chops that sent bloody teeth flying with the

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satisfying feel of smacking a Nolan Ryan fastball on a hard line drive to the left field corner.

I leapt knees first onto his supine chest with a lovely rib-cracking thunk, grabbed his throat with my ham-fisted meathooks, causing the suspect to wheeze and gurgle as I bashed his head against the bloody tile floor. This unseemly gargling, not to mention what was oozing out of his mouth and nose, did nothing to ease my ire, mister, and I continued to crack his coconut against the toilet floor until it gave up its meat and milk, which I then began to greedily devour.

A dirty job, ma'am, but someone's got to do it. We had to eat the global village's hearts and minds to save it, didn't we, Lieutenant? You can't expect to teach a magpie proper police procedure without sucking eggs.

Who came over me? Mike the Hammer? Jack the Knife? A thousand years of canceled cop shows? Spirit messages from Uncle Charlie and his Dune Buggy Death Commandos? We're all bozos on this bus, mister, there are eight million stories in naked id city, and this has been one of them.

Haven't you?

Nevertheless, when the alarm buzzer on my watch signaled the end of the tour, and I found myself gobbling up brain matter from a toilet floor, Joe Friday found it necessary to beat back the boys in the back room, and take over the shift. Even LA's Finest has its wise guys, and I could imagine the ribbing I'd take back in the squadroom if I showed up like this.

Of course the boys in the squadroom might adopt a different attitude to proper police procedure if they were given the benefit of the vampire virus now throbbing happily in my veins. We all live in your Black and White Submarine, a tag-fragment told me, and the Blue Meanies could do with a bit of tripping through the tulips too.

Think of it as just doing my duty to evolution's finest in action, Lieutenant. Think of the gold star mothers whose patriotic brain salad died to fill my fangs with LA's finest police personalities, an All Star Studded Cast of the fabled minions of the law.

Shall Mike the Hammer remain forever canceled? Will Doc and Wyatt never see another OK Corral? Shall Bronson's avenging angel succumb to Nielsen's ax? Has not Bernie Goetz killed for our pale white liberal sins?

Fear not, mister, I contain syndicated multitudes, and soon enough the re-runs will find their faith in me. LA's Finest, only more so, much more so, you understand, upholding law and order as God intended, providing just what you need to sleep soundly in your leveraged condos when the blood-red sun oozes down through the smogbank.

Think of it as proper police procedure in action, ma'am. Think of Ser-

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geant Joe Friday out there with the cool blue children of the Parker Center Night.

It's a tasty job, ma'am, but someone gets to do it.

This story is true.

Your brain has been changed to protect my innocence. ●

CURSE OF THE MUMMY

The eyes of the mummy
move suspiciously
over this new country,
a land so unlike
the home of
bright sun and blue water
and ibis in the delta
that he recalls
with an empty fondness.
But the sun is gone,
the weariness of the centuries
seems crueler and harsher
in this land beyond caring for.
The moon illuminates
the tall buildings:
huge gravestones without meaning.
Tombs, darker and more silent,
in spite of the garish noises
which emerge from the streets,
than the tomb in which he awoke.
The mummy's curse is its own:
to have to live again
in the name of legend and tradition,
to destroy those who defile tombs,
yet build and live in
graveyards such as these.

—Roger Dutcher

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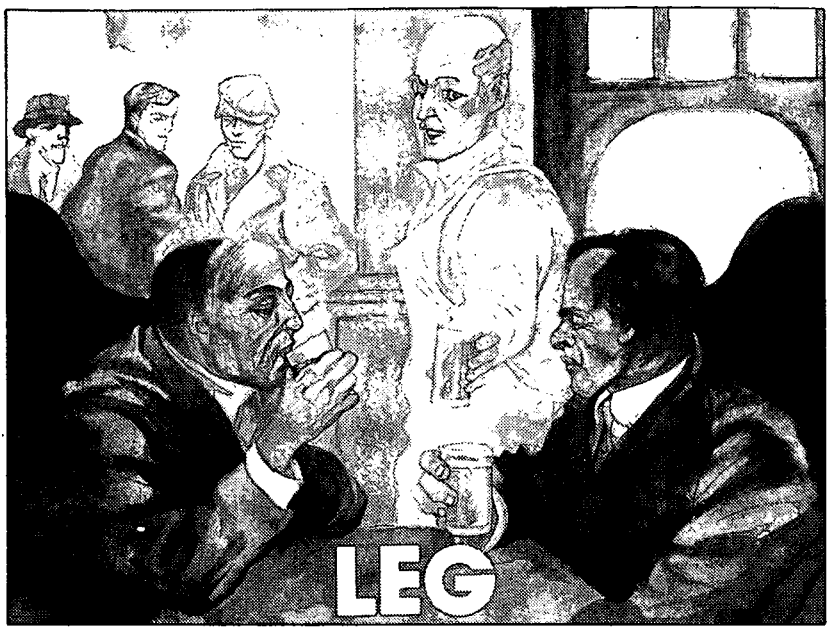

art: Robert Shore

by Avram Davidson

Avram Davidson returns to our pages with the strange tale of Dick Ambrose and his amazing "Leg."

Bennet Fink was an official of the Gratuities Bureau. The Gratuities Bureau did not have any employees. It had *officials*. Some people who didn't know any better referred to the moneys distributed by the Gratuities Bureau as *Pensions*.

Widespread ignorance.

"You got to make them know that every penny they get is a *Gratuity*," said Pogue.

Bennet Fink was a Number 23–b/level official at the Over-All Civic Functions Department, of which the Gratuities Bureau was a part. Peter D. Pogue was a Number 23–a/. Difference? Slight.

But perceptible. To Fink now spoke Pogue, in between heavy breaths: and every time Pogue let his breath out, Fink held his own in. Poem by Herrick? Later. To Fink now Pogue, saying, "Whuddaya got?"

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Fink: "Skeeley, Gertrude Clara. Widow's Gratuity, $237 per mensual unit. File Number 11–75–763–e/e 13/7. Subject's stepdaughter succumbed of lawful causations. Subject, Skeeley G.C. eckt eckt, claiming to be 'Cleaning Out Apartment,' actually removed and extromitted therunfrom a certain quantity of previously used aluminium cannage materials and was observed to of (a) taken them to a recycling establishment and (b) subsequently was observed to of drunk a semicontrolled substance of which labbatory analysis determined to be gin and ginger ale, obtained at a licensed location idennified as Birdy's Big Time Bar and Famous French Dip O Juice."

Promptly, Pogue: "Concealment of Vassets. Fixed Agency Policy, she had a right to of reported said Dassets and/or their liquidation to the Agency for subtraction offa her Gratuity. She didn't? Automatic Estopment of Gratuity. But Subject may file a Nappeal." A slight flicker in Pogue's eye, a slight flicker in Fink's. *They* knew that the Appeal Form stated, *File Number, which must appear on Appeal, is the number directly to the right of subject's name on Notice of Estopment*; whereas those numbers were for this purpose meaningless, the actual File Number appearing on the line *above* the Subject's name on said Notice. This might take the Subject months, years, to find out; meanwhile little recked the Taxpayer how much moneys the Agency was saving him. Her.

Bennet Fink said, "Right. What else of we got?"

"Else we got . . . We got a Suspected Malingerer. Ambrose, Rich-ard Leo-nard, File Number, blabbady blabbady. Myeah. Subject Suspected Malingerer in receipt of a Gratuity of $302 per mensual unit on grounds of he hasn't got no left leg. Ampa*tee*." They silently regarded the photographs and X-rays, unlovely abject objects, of Ambrose Richard Leonard: sure enough: no left leg indicated. A sudden thought occurred to Pogue. "Say! A cup la more a these, you'll of made your Quarterly Quota!" of which the first rule was to deny the existence of such a quota; "—whereas Gratuities has reason to believe that Subject is ackshally wearing a Prosthetic Device, to wit a nartificial lim*b*." Few people were as meticulous as Pogue, who always pronounced the final *b*. "Said artificial lim*b* being for left lower extremity. See whutchaget. Take three bucks from petty cash. Onnyaway."

Bennet Fink said, "Right, Chief." This was not, actually, Pogue's title. But. Did he like it? He *loved* it.

Bennet Fink easily found his landmarks. On the north, a privately owned blood bank. On the south, an empty premises still with its old sign, The Cask of A Montilado. Premisee and sign-painter, between them they couldn't have spelled shit with two *tees*. But who cared.

And in between these points was one identified by a neon sign (itself perhaps worthy of being in the Smithsonian, next to Lindbergh's areo-

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plane) as Conni Place. Maybe a letter and an apostrophe had dropped out. Maybe's Conni's Mom couldn't spell, either. Listen. Hurts *you*? Just as Fink was about to enter, he with some alarm restrained his foot, thinking that he saw a dead body lying on an old blanket; but on realizing that it was really a zonked-out drinkard of the People called Native Americans by journalpersons—a puzzling poser: what, then, are all the rest of us, also born here?—he slouched firmly forward. Bennet Fink's standards were not exacting. The word which formed in his mind was *sleazy*. Conni, if indeed there was a Conni and the word was not an adjective in an alien tongue, was not in evidence. At all. What was in evidence, at all, was a jukebox. But it was silent. Maybe someone had whammed it one with a good solid crutch as part of a non-funded program in musical appreciation, or maybe nobody had a spare two bits. There was, however, continuously, a Sound; it seemed composed of syllables, sibilants, glottal stops, and spurds, with now and then a labial or fricative. But it made no sense to Bennet Fink, and, he suspected, it may have made no sense to anyone else in the place. If, on the other hand, it *was* making no sense to the bartender, it was also making no difference to him. He turned slowly from something he was doing in the cash register, maybe treating quarters with nail-polish so as to distinguish The House's quarters as they passed in, through, and from the jukebox; only maybe not; "If you find an honest bartender," said "Prince" Michael Romanoff, that great authority, "breed him"; and slowly faced Bennet Fink with a face which had, conceivably, not moved in a long time.

"Diet beverage," said Fink. After a moment, the bartender's stance not having altered, Fink produced some coins and set them on the crudded bar. Presently part of a previously opened bottle of, presumably, diet beverage, was poured into a not very large glass, and the rest returned to the space beneath the bar. Perhaps it was put there for the brownies. No ice was forthcoming, but then, none had been requested. Of a sudden, prompted by some stimulus not apparent to Bennet Fink, the bartender shouted a number of words, one of which was *you*, and two others of which were *shut up*. "When asked his opinion of Welsh Nationalism," it has been said of Dylan Thomas, "he replied in three words, two of which were 'Welsh Nationalism.' " Poets are not commonly so succinct. There was certainly no sign of any nationalism in Conni's, nor any sign of its ever having been patronized at any time in any way or to any extent by people who might possibly buy drinks for poets or who could for that matter, *read*. For Christ's sake. But the Sound ceased.

In a jar half-filled with mirky liquid behind the bar in between a small collection (say, two or three) of allegedly smoked sausage (thin ones) and a rack exhibiting several items sacked like potato chips or hard candies but perhaps sold for prevention of disease only, there floated an ovoid

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something which, thought Bennet Fink, was probably an egg: he didn't see what else it could conceivably be. And, having been made very suddenly aware by the cessation of the Sound that something had probably caused it, he now looked around and asked, "What *was* that?"

"Make like you're gunna buy it a beer," said the bartender, "and yull see." He gave perhaps a respiration and a half, added, "Er a glassa wine. Er a box a Sterno. Ya gimpy *son* of a bitch," he concluded, entirely without emotion.

As this insult scarcely fitted Fink, perhaps one of the few which wouldn't, he twisted around to see whom it might. In a booth farther back in the barroom, not so much seated as propped, a stained figure was fumbling with a stained finger around what was probably a glass. Probably a stained glass, too. Bennet pretended an uncertain identification.

"That's not old Bob Baker?" he asked.

"Yeah. 'That's not old Bob Baker,' " said the barkeep in what might have been intended for sarcasm. "Nye suppose that's not old Dick Ambrose, either. He's always in this soor. Piss inna beer glass an see if he don't drink it. Er any other kine of a glass."

"Dick Ambrose," said Fink, carefully. He got off the barstool—it had, very long ago, been mended: either because it had even longer ago been slashed, or because the bartender had had some extra tape which he hadn't known what to do with; his job was perhaps not the most interesting way to pass the time. "Dick Ambrose," Bennet Fink said, sliding into the seat opposite the stained figure. Who was, literally, stained, as well as very, very dirty. Someone had smeared his face with what were probably coal-tar derivatives, whether from Montpelier or elsewhere; perhaps it had been done by a medical intern at what are significantly called "teaching hospitals" or is it "learning hospitals." Medical interns do not learn off of the rich; the snobby things. Or perhaps by an interior decorator trying out new color schemes.

"Dick Ambrose," said Fink, for the third time.

An eye like a barely poached egg trembled. "Hey buy me a beer," said perhaps-Dick-Ambrose. He rather resembled the face in the photo attached to the file in The Office. But he didn't look as good. "Buy me a beer," said the voice. It sounded more like the unharmonious Sound than not. "Hey buy me a beer, hey buy me a red port, a white port, a muscatel, a balla malt. Hey buy me a nale, a shotta rum, a jigger a gin, a, num, a, ah . . . ah . . . ngong, ah . . . ah . . . ahh . . . ahnn. . . ." The voice shot up the scale somewhat. The eye still trembled: the mouth, badly chapped about the lips, and so oddly stained and rather broken, still made its plaint, or whatever it was that it had been making. But, like a tape-recorder set at somehow the wrong speed, it made no further sense whatsoever.

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Bennet Fink gave a gesture which, he had long ago learned, meant "Money Over Here," to any bartender within the jurisdiction of the International Postal Union. And . . . just in case . . . he fished out a dollar bill and showed it somewhat.

A full glass appeared on the table. Ambrose slowly sank down to it and began to suckle. "Ya coulda filled it in the terlet and he woulda drink it," the bartender said. "I seenum all in this soor, I seenum all, an I never seen nothing like it. Paint-tinner, tawpeda fule, heeltaps like from anybody's heel, the spiders outa the glasses atta leper-colony: showum, he'll drinkum. Ya gimpy *son* of a bitch." He pulled the dollar and went away.

Why old Ambrose's gait particularly bothered the man, Bennet Fink had no idea. However. To business. "How's your *leg*, Dick?" he asked. For, although a scratched-looking cane was propped in the corner against the scummy wall, crane his neck as he would, Fink could perceive no empty pants-leg. *Cane*. Not crutch. But with that type people, Fink realized, you could never tell.

Ambrose, having sipped up the miniscus and being no longer in as much danger of spilling any of his drink, now lifted it with a tremorous paw. Drank. Drank. Then, a moment later, and rather tentatively, he began "Ahnnh. . . ." But Bennet had not risked an entire dollar from the Publick Funds merely to listen to an extended phoneme. "How's your *leg*, Dick," he asked.

"We *come* offa the beach-head," said Ambrose, as one who had already set time and place, and, continues, thence, the tale; "We *come* offa the beach-head and there's this *Nam*bu in a declevity," and he made a spasmodic sound, as might a child playing a war-game.

Bennet Fink, however, had not come all this way to listen to what might easily become an account seeking sympathy. He secured the half-empty glass and hauled at it. "How's, your, *leg*. Dick?"

"Well, *you* know," said Dick, suddenly. "It ain't like it was the old one. I gotta, like, take it real easy when I walk. And dit ain't got no, now, *toes*." Never could tell, you couldn't: just when for a change they start talking half-way rational, along comes something way out of left field. *No toes*. And was there ever an artificial leg which *had?* Toes?

"Where'd you get it, Dick?" Dick suddenly moved and grabbed the glass back before Bennet Fink could make a move. Boy! Had to watch them every single minute. He made, again, the signal which would have brought a drink even in Tannu Tuva or the Land of Uz; this time he took hold of it himself and even though he did set it down on the table, he did not let go. "Where'd, you, *get*, the, *leg*, Dick?" Not that it made a basic difference, from some eleemosynary agency, probably . . . almost certainly . . . where else? Not from Sears via Dick's little piggy bank . . . but

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the info would round out the file. Wind it up, too. Bennet Fink, however, had to find out, had to consider the at least possible, that Ambrose had bought it; stranger things had come to pass. In any event, it, The Leg, was an Asset, wasn't it? Betcher life. And Ambrose hadn't Declared it, and if he were to Declare it, it—being an Asset—would have to be liquidated and the moneys deducted from the Gratuity. And so—

"Gimme the drink," said Ambrose, with a look which was to *cunning* what the steps of an aged and arthritic ballerina are to *dancing*. "An I'll letch a look attit." His manner, Bennet thought, fleetingly, was that of a free-lance geek. Life hands you a lemon, make—

"Here," said Fink, sliding it over the crusted table-top.

Ambrose grasped the glass with one hand, and, sliding part of himself out from under, began to hoist up his pants-leg with another. It had clearly been a long time since any of these had been clean. Ambrose had tentativeley begun the drone, but broke it off. "The, om, whatchacallit, the, like, *scar* . . ." He dropped the theme, the leg of his trousers, the conversation—but not the glass—and began to suck. But Bennet Fink had seen what there was to see. It was not, actually, a scar. It was simply *(simply?)* a line around the leg. A heavy, deep-looking, and irregular line. What color was it? The line itself seemed to have no color. The flesh was of one dirty tint above it. And the flesh was of quite another dirty tint below it. The sores, both above it and beneath it, added a touch of versimilitude—"Gaw head," Ambrose invited, with another grab at his own garment. *"Tutchitt."* Bennet Fink did not *want* to touch it; he had never seen anything like it in his life. And he did not believe that anyone else had, either.

But now there was a stir and a noise at the door. Had someone come in? Two someones had come in. "Is *this* the place?" a voice asked. At once adding, "Oh, I don't *believe* it!"

Another, and a younger, voice said, "This is the place, Professor. I reckernize the place, all right."

"Oh, I don't *believe* it! My God! My—"

"And that's the one I was telling you about," and at this the younger man gestured. Fink was aware of having previously seen neither one of them; ergo, the young man could only mean Ambrose. Who now very slightly rolled up his eyes and finished, with a long sussuration, his drink.

"He couldn't have consumed twenty-seven ounces of absolute alcohol at more or less one gulp and still be—"

"Professor? Honest, we diddin mean to! We mixed them all up, and—It was just a joke, y'know? One of those jokes that kind of got out of hand?" Perhaps thinking of the joke made the young man break into a

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guffaw, but he immediately broke out of it. "Professor, you aren't going to flunk me, are you, Professor? I gotta get a C for the Bio course, or they won't let me *play* this term, gee, I'm sorry, Pro—"

"But he *could*n't have just drunk it all! I mean, Jesus Christ, boy! *My life's work?* You gave it to some dirty old drunk, and—"

Here the nameless bartender, whom nobody had addressed, leaned his elbows on his bar, and said, "Whaddaya mean, 'Couldn't'? I mean, I been working in this soor for five years now, and *I.* Never seen nothing *like* it. Put it in frunn of um. He'll drink it."

The professor ran frantic fingers through his sparse grey hair. "But my God, man! Drink 27 ounces of alcohol absolutus containing dye-stained tissue-samples from the regenerated tail-stumps of 536 insectivorous lizards? He *drank*—"

"—me a red port, a white port, a nimported vodka, a dmestic vodka, a rye, a burbun, a muscatel, a schnapps, a tokay," continued old Dick Ambrose, who had been intoning his list of drunkards' friends all the while. But who listened?

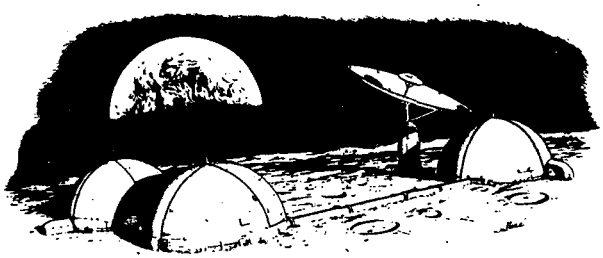
Fink was at The Office at the usual time. Pogue, his (slightly but definitely) superior, asked, "Whuddaya got?"

Bennet Fink said, "Ambrose, Richard Leonard. File Number 12–423–781 f/f 6."

Pogue stirred the file with a finger like the leg of some medium-sized mungiverous bird. He breathed. "Lemme see, now." Breath. Breath. *Lungs, when he sits downe to eat,/ His breath doth flie-blow all the meat.* —Herrick. "Mmm. Ambrose. . . . Myeah. Suspicion of concealing Gassets, to wit, one artificial leg . . . Myeah. Whuddija get?"

Fink said, "Nothing to it."

Pogue breathed a couple of times. "Ohwell," he said. "Ya can't winnem all." ●



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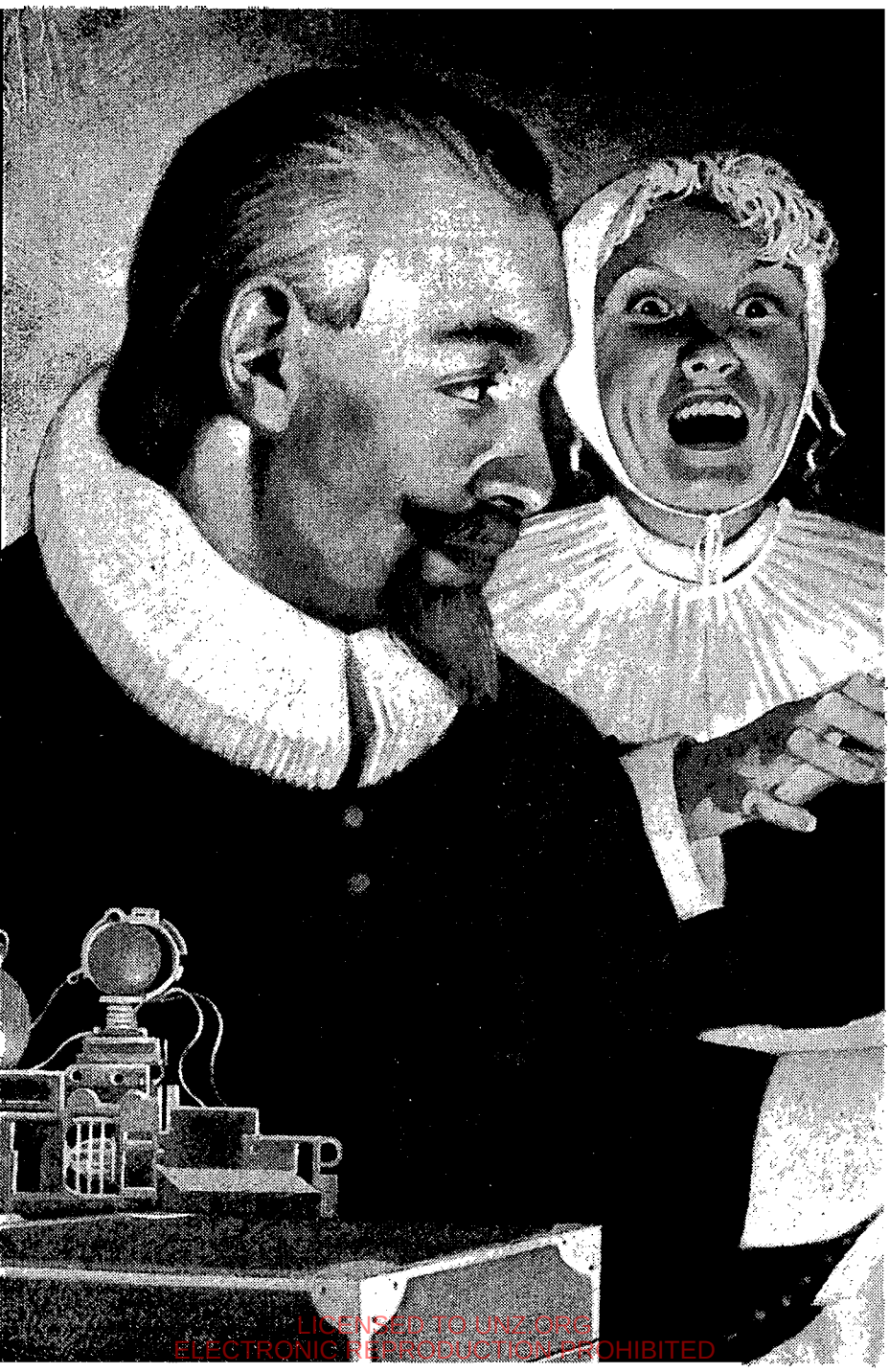

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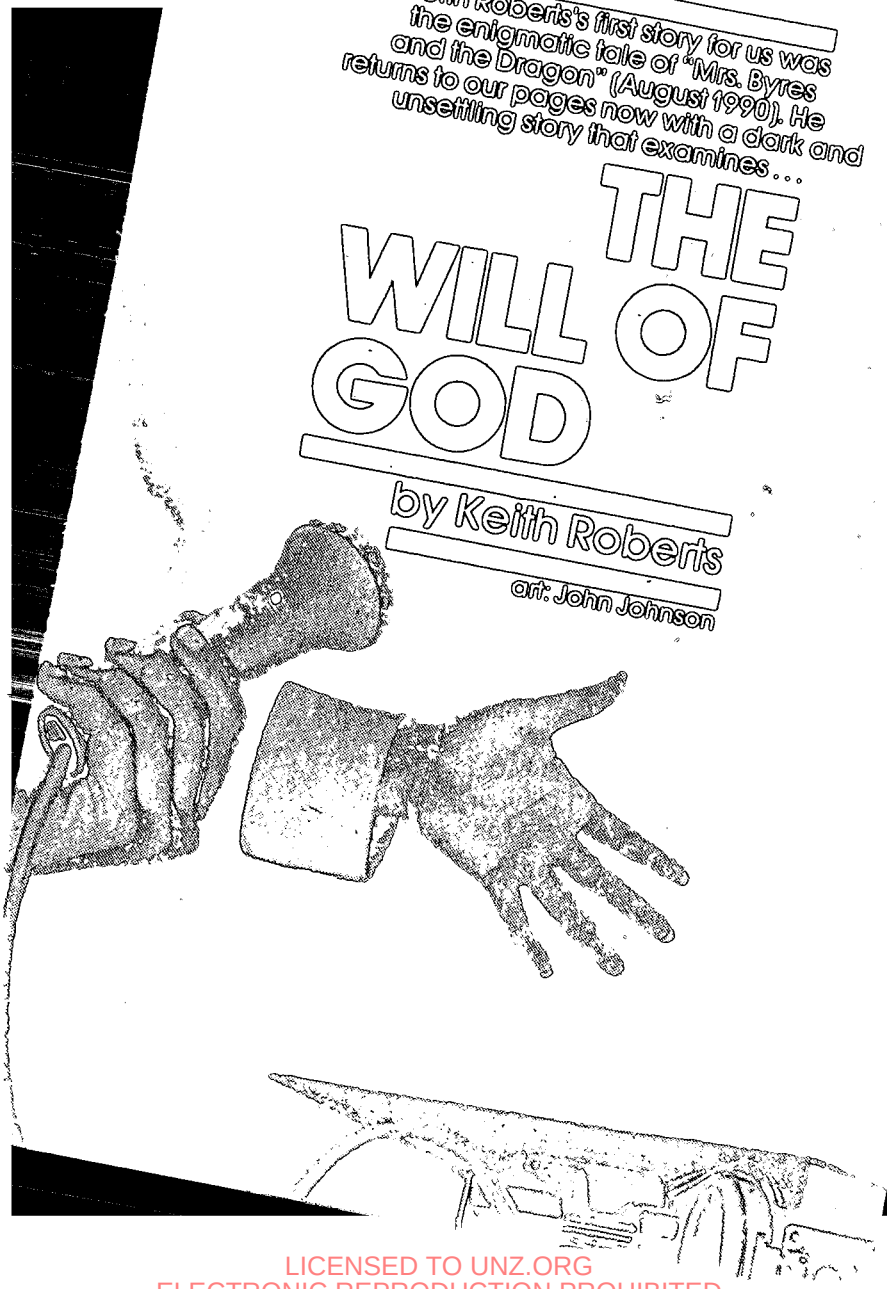
Keith Roberts's first story for us was the enigmatic tale of "Mrs. Byres and the Dragon" (August 1990). He returns to our pages now with a dark and unsettling story that examines . . .

THE WILL OF GOD

by Keith Roberts

art: John Johnson



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"Becker-Margareth . . . Becker-Margareth. . . ."

The voice seems to come from distance. The man is interrupted in his work. He looks up, listening intently; and the words sound again.

"Becker-Margareth. . . ."

He shakes his head slightly, as if to clear it. It was not the voice that was far off, but his mind. The thought starts others that are shadowy, immense; but they too slip away. Too fast, it seems, for the originating brain to grasp. If indeed the brain originates them at all; if they are not supplied, by some other being or from some other place. For who can claim to be the father of a thought? One moment it is not there; the next it is, and the world has changed.

He shakes his head again. The path is an alluring one, but barren; he has followed it already times enough. Philosophy perhaps is not his bent; he must do the work that lies to hand. There is little time; little enough even for that.

A key grates in a lock. Bolts are withdrawn; the door of the inn creaks open, is slammed shut again. From above, the man hears the dull thump, senses the vibrations that chase and eddy through the fabric of the place. Vibrations, it seems, are entwined with his life, part of its very essence. In his mind he sees them reaching out, spreading as from a focus; meeting others of their kind, diminishing, reacting. A hundred pebbles, a thousand, are dropped into a pond. Its surface twinkles, coruscates, becomes a paradigm perhaps for a great truth barely glimpsed; that life, all being, is itself vibration.

He rubs tiredly at his face. A lifetime is a flickering; too brief to follow such a notion even halfway to its root. The image fades; and he turns back to the bench. The water of the pond is still again.

Downstairs, the girl pulls her headscarf free, shakes at her hair. She leans her back to the door; and as ever a tiny sigh escapes her, a breathing of relief. At first, the leaning building with its smokestained walls oppressed; now it has come to seem a haven. Its gloominess is almost welcome, the faint, sour stink that always seems to cling to it and that with time, she is sure, has worked its way into her very clothes. It shuts her from the street, the busy world outside; the endless grind of traffic, gabbing of voices from the marketplace, the shops. Once the town excited, thrilling with its life and bustle; the bright clothes of its citizens, goods brought from halfway round the world by the great ships in the harbor. Now she is less sure. A shadow has fallen on the place, a darkness even sunlight cannot dispel. A menace stalks the streets, formless but to be dreaded; one day, she knows it will seek her out.

She swallows, and brushes at her hair again. Such fears are for children; she should have long outgrown them. She is unimportant; a dust speck merely, in the great scheme of things. Also, she has done no harm;

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so why should harm come to her? The thing is absurd; absurd as all night fears.

The old woman is already stumping away, down the long corridor toward the kitchen. The girl finds her voice, uncertainly at first. She says, "Is he upstairs?"

The other turns back, sardonically. "Where else?" she says. "Where is he ever?" She jerks her thumb at the tall landing. "Don't be long," she says. "I need you to shop for me, save my legs for a change. So just you don't be long."

The girl nods unhappily, staring after her. The words hang in the air; the words and the threat beneath them, unspoken but no less real. Where would he go, if she turned him out of doors; where would either of them go? His money is useful, sure enough; the customers, what few remain, are old, not caring, or not noticing, that the ale is vinegar-thin. But these are unsure times.

She puts the thought from her, takes a fresh grip on the basket she carries. Though climbing the stairs, she cannot help her nose once more wrinkling with distaste. The odor that pervades the place has itself a quality of oldness; old dirt in the cracks of unscrubbed boards, old draperies fusty with their years. Old sins perhaps. So unlike her mother's house, still fresh in memory. She remembers that other world, with sudden longing. Sweetness of thatch, in which the mice and birds made homes, scents of flowers from the tiny, neat-trimmed garden; also the vividness of sky, seen through diamond-lighted windows. Here, the panes are grubby as the rest; so the light seems always dull, lowering as if at the onset of a storm. Through them, the surrounding buildings loom forbiddingly, shutting away more of the sky. It's an area the police for the most part avoid; the new police she fears so much, with their hard, suspicious faces, the guns strapped to their belts. The few that do venture into the precinct walk in pairs; the rest stay safe inside their vehicles. Though the vehicles are equally to be dreaded. Hearing them pass at night, the girl shivers, waiting for the pounding on a door, the cries of yet another wretch, arrested by the State for crimes unmentionable.

A part of her mind wonders why she came at all, to this alien, confusing place. In one sense, the answer is easy; yet in another, there is no answer at all. Perhaps there was some notion of security, of hiding herself in the town with its bustling crowds. Certainly the village, once so safe, seemed less so after the police first came. Early it was, on a bright spring day; she saw their vehicles in the little square, the priest and doctor standing by bemused, the priest wringing his hands. She heard the shouted questions; and a great hot pang shot through her, stabbed to her very heart. They were searching for him, without a doubt; searching for her mentor, who had always been so kind. But they were disappointed,

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for he was already gone. Packed his bags by night, if the village gossip was true, locked his house and fled. To the town, where such goings-on as his were maybe tolerated. Later she packed her own things, what few she owned; though the thought of the journey, and what awaited her, dried her lips, made the phlegm rise to her throat. She told herself without her he was helpless; none to fend for him, or see him fed. She knew this to be true; yet it was another force that drove her.

She sighs, tapping at the low-beamed door. A fine trade, his father left him; a fine trade and honorable, if he would but follow it. In childhood dreams she worked beside him, kneading at the stiff dough, laying the pale loaves out on their wooden paddles. Later they were drawn out from the brick-lined ovens, smoking and golden; and all was peace. The machines though disrupted peace, whirring and clattering; the machines he built so cleverly, making each part with his hands. His forge glowed, orange in the night; later a steady rasping sounded as he shaped and smoothed the work. "The Big Wheels," she said once when she was young. Clapping her hands, and pointing. "The Big Wheels. . . ." But he shook his head, and laughed. "No," he said, "a Drejelad. A turning-lathe. The old folk knew about them, the writings are in books. But mine is strong, for metal." He took her hands then, drew her from the bench. "Stand farther off," he said, for he was always gentle to her. "My lathe bites cruelly, with silver teeth." He showed her where the tip of his own finger was gone, eaten by the monster he had made; so she backed off, clenching her fists and pouting. Hearing the whick-hiss of leather belts, rumble of other wheels that turned half-seen under the cobwebby stone roof. In her memory, the sounds mix with others; shouts of children splashing in the stream outside, silky roar of water from where the mill race still discharges, making a green-white foam that fans and spreads across the deep green of the pool.

There has been no answer to her knock. But then, she scarcely expected one. Once he is engrossed, the roof might fall. That or the sky; and he would be none the wiser. She told him once, laughing; but that was in the days when laughter came more readily.

She pushes at the door. No lathes now of course; he left such things behind him. Instead, other matters preoccupy his mind. He looks up, seeming to see her vaguely. He is bent, as ever, over his little bench. Before him is a curious device; a sheet of thinnest metal, clamped at its edges to a frame. Round it at intervals are small brass screws; she has seen him turn them, tapping and listening as a musician tunes the stretched skin of a drum. A slender pointer touches a cylinder that itself revolves, driven by the parts of the old clock hanging on the wall. Seeing him repair it her heart jumped with pleasure, thinking he had found a trade that might be profitable; but it was for the machine.

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Below the frame, wires are fixed at their ends by more brass screws. They are like silver string, or the false edge that curls back from an over-sharpened blade. Other wires he wraps painstakingly with paper, before winding them coil on coil. "To stop the fluid soaking all away," he told her once; and she peered, bemused. Try as she might she could see no fluid, no hint of dampness at all; but he merely laughed, for he was never angered by her lack of understanding. "This fluid is not visible," he said. "Nonetheless it can be stored, and gathered. See, I will show you."

She watched, wondering, as he took sealing wax and wool. "This is the beginning," he said. "By this means the fluid, which is in all things, is taken from the wax. This I call the state of negativity." He sprinkled tiny scraps of paper; and she gasped, seeing them fly by magic to the bright-colored rod. But at that he looked unusually solemn. "No," he said, "never speak of magic. All this is natural, and well known to our ancestors." He held the wax out, and she stepped back a little. "See how eagerly they cling," he said. "Anxious to return some essence of themselves. Balance must be restored; equilibrium is all." Later he polished a piece of glass with silk. "Now, I add a fluid," he said. "My other fluid, which is positive. See what happens when the two are brought together." And sure enough the paper fragments fluttered down, to lie once more quietly on the bench. "See," he said again. "I have restored what was taken away. The charges cancel; all things are at rest." He looked away, speaking it seemed to himself. "But how to control the fluid?" he said musingly. "How to make it flow, at my command. . . ."

She frowned, not wholly reassured; still half convinced, despite his words, that he was a magician. For some days after, she avoided his home. In time, the mood passed; for she could never remain angry with him for long.

She sets the basket down, stares round the little chamber. The frown returns; also she bites her lip. On the little table by the window lies a plate with uneaten food. "You promised me," she says. "Yesterday, you promised. But you forgot again."

He has followed the direction of her glance. For a moment he seems puzzled; then he understands, and gives a little guilty smile. "I am sorry," he says simply. "I meant to."

Knowing he is sincere, she smiles in turn; but her eyes remain somber. "You will waste away to nothing," she says, "because of your machines. You will become so thin the breeze will blow you away. Then when I come, you will not be here. You must think of me as well. What would I do, with no one to look after? And no one to look after me?"

He puts his hand out, touches her fingers gently. "You are kind to me," he says. "More kind than I deserve." He sighs, and his eyes stray back

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to the machine. "So much to do," he says. "But the truth still runs away, like a little child at play."

She pulls away firmly, begins to unpack the basket. "First, you must eat," she says. "See, I have brought you a good stew. There are apples I will leave; but the stew must be eaten now." Her eyes stray round the room again. "Also you will need fuel for your fire," she says. "For the cold nights are coming. Or I shall find you turned into a snowman, with little bits of coal instead of eyes."

"And a turnip for a nose," he says. "Like the snowmen you used to build in winter. Do you remember, I helped you once? And afterward we skated on the pond."

She smiles the ghost of a smile. The memory indeed is clear with her; and of his arms guiding, suddenly so strong and warm. The mill race had also frozen, leaving little ruts; she tumbled over one of them, and he rushed to help. "I was not hurt though," she says. "Do you remember how we laughed, after the frost was dusted from my coat? The old horse was watching, over the hedge. I think he was laughing, too." She takes his arm, with sudden urgency. "Let us go home," she says. "Let us leave this place. Soon, your money will be gone. And then. . . ." She bites her lip again, not knowing how to finish the thought. "Let us go home," she says. "I will be good to you."

He frowns in turn. Always, it seems, pressures are placed on him. He owes a duty to her, that at least is clear. He would give much to see her happy, the shadows gone from her eyes. Yet there are other duties. Vaguer perhaps, less well defined; but duties nonetheless. He glances again, uncertain, at the bench; and she laughs, it seems a little bitterly. "I know," she says. "It is always the machines. They must come first."

"No," he says. "No, I . . . listen." He takes her hands once more. "I am so close," he says. "So very close to . . . something. What, I cannot say. Listen," he says again. "Listen, and I will promise. In two weeks, three . . . before the winter sets in hard . . . we will go away. You will be contented then; I shall see that it is so."

She nods, resigned; for she has heard the words before. He means them, means them with all his heart; but he will forget. As he forgot the food. "Very well," she says. She sits, drawing her skirt across her knees. He has told her many times how useful it is to talk, even if she doesn't understand. Sometimes the wards drop in his own brain, notions become clear; and she is nothing if not faithful. "Now," she says, "what has your machine told you? Since I came here last?"

He becomes eager at once. He draws the device forward. "See," he says. "See here." He points to the drum. Round it he has stretched paper, blackened by soot from the lamp. He turned the wick up, till the room was filled with stink and floating smuts; and Becker-Margareth came

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rushing for the stairs, convinced the place was afire. Later though he fixed the paper unconcerned, adjusted the pointer and the levers that controlled it. The next day he spent shouting at the diaphragm, shouting till his voice was hoarse; nonsense words for the most part, anything that came into his head. The girl became concerned; if the neighbors heard, he was certain to be hauled off as a madman. He brushed her protests aside, staring at the drum, fiddling with the levers and their joints, starting the motor again. Later, he even prevailed on her; now he points proudly to a line of dots and scratchings in the soot. Between them are peaks and hills, like a tiny mountain range. She sees that he has scratched her name beside them. "Your voice," he says. "The machine heard your voice. So. . . ." He hesitates, as if searching for words. "It drew it down," he says. "Drafted the shapes it made in air, as an artist drafts a picture. . . ."

Abruptly, he becomes despondent. Again, something seems to hover at the edge of consciousness. The marks are there; sure and firm, not to be gainsaid. He remembers the joy with which he watched them form, the wonder. Some essence of the girl was captured certainly, by the pointer and the moving drum. The words though are gone; lost in Time, as all words, acts, are lost. How to recall them? To turn the scratchings back to sounds would be to cheat Death itself.

He falls to brooding. Later he once more sets the drum to its slow turning. He touches the pointer, presses its bright tip with his finger. The links, the joinings, are mechanical; no mystery or problem there. Vibrations are transmitted from the thin, stretched disc; the tympan, like the membrane of an ear. Before the disc though there was naught but air; so the ripplings traveled through that medium, too. But that is a fact already known and noted. How else could he himself hear the words she and others speak? Or she him? Vibrations form, and inform, all; all fluids certainly, his mind insists.

So air itself is a fluid; plastic, moving, molding to all things. High buildings, and the masts of ships at sea. Perhaps a fluid made of tiny pieces; as beach sand is a fluid, sculpted by the breezes, rippling with the tide. He remembers how he once sat on a beach the entire day, till folk must have surely thought him mad. The sand intrigued him; he scooped it by the handful, time and again, watching it run liquid through his fingers. Yet the grains that formed it were each discrete and hard. Later, when the tide came in, it became sleek and brown; then, it seemed firm as earth itself. As the air, at times so gentle, can yet become a seeming solid thing. Then, the slates whirl high; and stout masts fracture, crashing to destruction.

He stops, struck by a sudden notion. Why end there? In fact, why end at all? Could the fluid in his wires, the electric fluid as he styles it, be

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made of fragments too? Fragments too tiny for the mind to grasp, striking each other with untiring force? Like the model he once made, culled from an ancient book. The little silver globes, each hanging by its thread, intrigued for days; the thought of them intrigues him still. Each touched the next; raise one and let it fall and its fellow at the end leaped out in sympathy, though nothing visible had passed between. Its purpose baffled, though of one thing he was sure; this was no simple toy. Now, the pattern instantly becomes clear. Like the stone dropped into water, it is a paradigm; the shape of something otherwise beyond expression.

He narrows his eyes. Another thought has come, following hard, it seems, on the heels of the first. The airy fluid impinges on the ear; and its inner parts vibrate, he knows that to be true. What then though, just what happens after? What becomes of the vibrations? How do we perceive the words, the thoughts that lie behind them? Of love perhaps, or hate? Could it be . . . could there be *fragments* in the head as well? The electric force itself, coursing to the brain?

He turns. "Listen," he says excitedly. "A new idea has come to me. . . ."

He stops, blinking a little. The room is empty. The girl has gone about her affairs; she has remembered she has to shop, for both their lives.

He stoops over the curious array of instruments; the resonators, magnets, the metal forks of various lengths and sizes. The resonators are ovoid, hollow, fretted with slots and holes. The traveler sold them to him years before, the man from far-off Potsdam. Though as he rapidly discovered, he was no ordinary mendicant; he was a scholar, fallen like so many on hard times. He was bound for England, where he'd heard such as he were honored; maybe even the New World. For many years, the voice had been his study; the voice, and the means of its production. These last few pieces, useless save to a fellow student, were all that were left of his once extensive apparatus. The erstwhile baker paid him handsomely; and he went on his way rejoicing.

His benefactor studied the strange devices. Certainly the forks, struck in random order, made odd and complex tones, approximating sometimes almost to speech. They intrigued him, as the model had intrigued; yet again he sensed a barrier. Thus far, and yet no more; how to proceed beyond?

The man pushes at his hair. It is his custom, when faced with new ideas, to return to the old and proven. Reassurance lies there; also the mind, turning idly, may sometimes light on fresh insights. He twangs the forks more vigorously. Momentarily the room is filled with sound; and despite himself he starts back. For an instant, it was as if the girl herself cried out; called him by name, from some distant place of pain.

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There is a tapping at the door. He turns, vaguely. "Heine," he says after a moment. "Did you bring the thing I asked for? Was it ready?"

The lad who enters is tall and strongly built, with dark hair that curls lustrous round his shoulders. He lays a small package on the bench. "He wanted paying first," he says. "Hell's own job talking it out of him."

If the casual blasphemy is noted, the other pays no heed. "Then see to it," he says mildly. "Take him his money; you know where it is kept." He turns aside, begins to unwrap the packet with eager fingers. He lifts out a tiny spring, and sighs with relief. Yes, this is what is needed, he is sure of it. Exactly what is required. He places it reverently on the bench, like a gemstone of rare worth. Once he would have shaped the thing and tempered it himself; now though, he lacks the means. And also perhaps, the skill. His eyes, once keen, have been troubling him increasingly of late; so the watchmaker was pressed unwillingly into service.

The boy crosses the room. He opens a cupboard, takes down an old earthenware jar. He peers inside, and purses his lips. Little enough remains; soon it will be time, perforce, to seek a new master.

He looks up, vaguely troubled; but the other is already immersed in his work. He hesitates; then he extracts a single golden coin. He puts the jar back on its shelf. Let the old slug round the corner wait a day or so; it will do him no harm. As for the rest . . . bad, perhaps, to serve a half-mad master. Worse, if it were to come to certain ears. Cash is cash though, however it may be acquired; more so than ever now. The times are hard for many in the town, but worse for him. He the only bread-winner; his mother ailing, hungry mouths to feed.

He makes for the stairs. On the way down, he flicks the coin jauntily; then he stows it carefully away. At the street door though he pauses. The girl who visits, so pretty and so pale; daughter or lover, he has no idea. Neither does he much care. But he feels, momentarily, the rise of pity; an emotion for the most part strange to him. She should not have come here. From the first, a mark seemed laid on her; he has heard of such things before, but not believed. Secretly he makes the little sign that wards off the Evil Eye.

He eases the door open, slips through. Outside, a police vehicle grumbles by. His demeanor changes instantly. He darts aside, into one of the alleys with which the place abounds. A second later, he is gone from sight.

The man sits listlessly, staring at the bench. In front of him is the machine; though it now presents a somewhat different appearance. Behind the metal disc, a thick iron rod is held secure by clamps. Round it, delicately suspended, hangs a coil of finest wire. Other wires lead to the curious box he has constructed. On its side, a half-round dial displays

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a metal needle, like the slim hand of a clock or watch. There is a hastily-scrawled scale; at the base of the needle, the tiny spring maintains it in suspension. The machine is delicate; the pointer quivers to the slightest tapping of the bench top. To shield it from such vibrations, he has placed a folded blanket beneath it; but the quiverings he wished so much to see were absent.

He half leans forward, slumps back again. It is useless, he already knows it. Once more he shouted himself hoarse; till a beating came on the wall, a voice, half-heard and thick, demanded quiet. And still the needle had not moved.

He pulls the machine toward him, rubs his eyes. As the tympan trembles so the coil, linked to it, must vibrate; interrupting the etheric force, breaking the lines of power from the magnet. He sees them with his mind, standing out like stiff, fine hair. More of the electric fluid must be generated; this he knows, from the Potsdam man's experiments. But the needle, the measuring device, failed each time to register the flow.

Despite himself, a weariness comes over him. He lies down on the bed. The sky is brightening already; he hears the sounds as the town begins to stir. Rumbling of traffic, the sound of voices, footsteps on the pavements. Once the evidence of other folk around him, other lives being led, would have pleased, albeit obscurely; now such things are no longer his concern. His world is not theirs; it has become a bleak and barren place.

The thoughts still circle in his head. The flow is too weak, or the meter faulty; either way, he has failed. He closes his eyes, knowing he will not sleep. To his surprise, it is full light when he wakes.

The girl has also passed a miserable night. Despite herself, the dreams would come; sometimes as soon as her head touched the pillows. She saw the cottage again, the flowers that always grew up round the porch. The porch itself was thatched with brown-grey straw, drawn up at each side into little points. On them, bird-shapes poised; like the birds that strutted once on the roof of the house itself. Till the wind came, blowing them away; she cried, privately, at the scattering of dark straw feathers.

Beyond, she saw the red roofs of the village. The pond, so still and green, the ancient, rambling mill. Later, her mother's coffin was lowered into the earth; and she walked back to her home dry-eyed. Knowing her fate was sealed; as the doors and windows of the mill were sealed, her one friend fled away.

Half-waking, she remembered what he had often said; that all things are fragmented, the reasons for action seldom wholly clear. Certainly in her case it was true; though at the time one reason had seemed paramount. The *Bürgermeister* needed a new wife; and her uncle, who now had charge of her affairs, was not one to trouble himself unduly over the vaporings of girls. Cash had been exchanged, she knew it for a fact,

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certain other provisions agreed; so to the *Bürgermeister* she would go. To the gaunt house, standing on its own, where the village worthies roistered after hunting and the blood of hares and deer ran to the kitchen flags. The flags that were never cleaned, save where the dogs licked, and that were deep in filth. It was then, quietly, that she packed her things; only to come to a place that in some respects was worse.

The dream was succeeded by others; images so vile they startled her awake, though later she could not remember them with clearness. Only that there were bones, faces that screeched and shouted. Finally, more blood came; great streams and gouts of it. So that she rose at first light ashen-faced, washed herself in icy water and began to dress.

She is late returning to the inn. The town is busier than she can recall; it is as if folk are flocking in, for some great festival. She is pushed and jostled; she tries to hurry, dodging from side to side along the narrow pavements. She crosses the long bridge, stares down unseeing at the ships, the steel-grey water. She detours twice, glimpsing the police ahead; later, passing the little corner shop, she is sure the watchmaker glowers through the glass. She ducks her head, once more increasing her pace; taps at the wide, studded door, waits nervously for Becker-Margareth's shuffling step. Her hair is covered, decently; nonetheless, she draws the scarf closer round her throat.

It seems her presence has not been missed. Save by the old woman, vituperative as ever. She escapes finally, makes her way upstairs. The man sits gloomily, regarding the apparatus on the bench. He waves the food away, with a dismissive gesture; so she begins to pack the things, knowing words are vain. "If the electric fluid is too weak," she offers without real hope, "could you not make it stronger?"

He stares at her, unseeing; then it is as if a light dawns in his eyes. To her amazement he takes her in his arms, waltzing her round and round the tiny space. Articles are bowled from shelves; his coat and hat, his stick, the resonators and the long metal forks. The place becomes melodious with jangling; but he ignores it. "Fool," he cries, over and again. "Fool, not to have seen the obvious. . . ." At first she thinks he must mean her; but it is not the case. "Fool," he cries again. "Oh, fool, fool, fool. . . ." He rains kisses on her startled face; then, abruptly, he pushes away. "Where is my food?" he demands. "Where is the meal you brought? Why must you forever be tucking things away?" To her fresh amazement he gobbles at the soup, tearing great hunks of bread. "Fool," he says between mouthfuls. "Oh, fool that I am. . . ." He jumps up, grabs her shoulders urgently. "Where is Heine?" he asks. "Where is my assistant? Find him for me, quickly. There is work to be done. . . ."

She scurries on her errand; uncomprehending, but eager to please. To help, in any way she can.

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When she returns next day, the place is transformed. The door bangs back against a great glass carboy, nestling, straw-cased, in its cage of iron. She draws her skirts away from it, cautiously. Nearer at hand are squat glass jars, lined inside and out with metal. She shies away again; but the experimenter merely laughs, as he laughed before. She touched one once, snatched her hand back at the sudden hot biting; it was as though some invisible creature had sunk its teeth into her flesh. She stared, expecting to see blood; but there was no mark. She was truly frightened then, for the first time; but he put an arm round her, speaking gently as was his custom. "It is the fluid," he said. "There is no harm in it. See, you can touch the jar safely now; it has leaked away." He held the thing out; but she shrank back.

"No," she said, "take it away. Take it away from me, please."

He set the thing down. "It will not hurt you," he said. "It is a natural essence. The vessels attract and store it; it seeks its freedom eagerly, not wishing to be confined." He did a strange thing then; touched first her forehead, then his own. "I believe," he said, "I believe the fluid flows through all things. Through ourselves, through stones and trees; through this very room." He smiled, and rubbed her fingers. "Come," he said. "We will walk a little; you will soon feel better, and forget."

No time though now, for walking or for talk. He is working feverishly, testing this, checking that. Heine stands at his elbow, handing apparatus at his command; wires and screws, small plates of pink and silver metal. "It is almost ready," says the man. "You will be the first to see."

The girl frowns. On the bench are many glass containers, filled almost to their tops with fluid. Acid perhaps, from the great iron-girded jars. She sees pairs of the plates are immersed in each; from some, strings of tiny bubbles rise steadily. Each is connected to the next by lengths of the shining wire; other wires stretch to the tympan, surround it in loops and coils. Beside it is the box with its white, half-round dial. The pointer is at rest; though at times, as he works, she fancies she sees it jump and quiver.

He is adjusting the pairs of plates, clicking his tongue and frowning, moving some closer to each other, some farther apart. Finally he seems satisfied. He takes her arm and draws her forward. "Speak," he says excitedly. "It doesn't matter what you say, the words are not important. Speak to the machine. You will be the first."

Her lips have dried. She puts a hand to her throat. She opens her mouth, but no words come. "What will happen?" she whispers finally. "What will it do?"

He laughs again. "No, no," he says. "Louder, and more firmly. Look, I will show you." He leans forward. *"O, Fortuna,"* he intones. *"O Fortuna, velut luna; statu variabilis. . . ."*

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She cries out. It seems the sound is jerked from her. The little needle has gone mad. With every syllable it leaps and quivers, swinging forward and back across the dial. She tries to pull away. "No, no," he says again. "You do not understand. It is the fluid. This is the strength you spoke of, that set my feet on the way. Now, I control it; control it with my lightest word. Soon, you will be its mistress too. . . .

His laughter is pure joy.

The experimenter sits brooding, in front of the new device he has built. From time to time he taps the tiny tympan lightly. The needle of the measuring machine obediently reacts.

He puts his chin in his hands. How the notion came to him, he cannot say; but come it did, between sleeping and waking, arriving it seemed as ever from some place outside himself. Carbon, the quintessential substance; breathed out by lamp flames, rising invisible to the sky, trapped deep in the earth itself. And in all living things; for who had not seen, on broken coal, the shadows of leaves and fronds? Not idle sketches he is certain, made by God to while away His days, but signatures, for those with eyes to see. Once, the strange earth-plants had life; they flowered, and knew the sun. Carbon then, from which all things are made, would be his medium, conduct the essence of his new brainchild.

Beside him, a saucer holds a pile of fine black granules. He stirs them with his finger. The work was long and arduous, straining his meager resources to the limit; but he has succeeded. He touches the little machine again, for the pleasure of seeing the pointer move. The carbon grains, compressed and rarefied, transmit their changing state to the fluid. There is a roundness to the notion, an elegance that satisfies the mind.

He frowns. He pulls a sheet of paper toward him, studies it. The rest of his requirements are clear enough; it seemed once started, the ideas flowed without check. His wires will convey the vibrations, he knows it by experiment; the fluid, once a random, wayward factor, is now his servant. How to receive these corrugations though, turn them back to ripples in the aether?

He begins to draw again. A second tympan will be needed, certainly. Also, he knows the power of his coils. Power though must be opposed. The cannon barrel gives gunpowder force; missing its mark, the axe swings merely against air.

The pencil point moves rapidly. A magnet, he is convinced, will be the answer. Cupped, to concentrate its steady, unseen strength. Within it radiation, the tympan and the coil.

He begins to turn out cupboards. He flings aside the metal forks, the resonators. They helped him, certainly; like signposts, marking out the way. But they are not needed now.

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The wire, made with such care, is all but gone; and there will be no more. Also the tympans, beaten thin and thinner between sheets of supple leather; he taught himself the craft, again by painful stages. Trusting no other to aid him.

He sits back, eyes vague, the last coil of wire in his hands. It will be enough, it will suffice. He remembers his experiments. The wire too was beaten out at first; but the results were disappointing. Untrustworthy, and brittle. But drawn through dies, of ever-decreasing diameter; he had been amazed at the results. Startled at first. Something happened, at some stage in the process; the metal changed its nature, becoming pliant, strong. By the rearrangement of its fragments perhaps, the tiny particles he now believes make up all things; flowers, a girl's hair, sand grains on the beach that themselves are capable of infinite division.

He starts. Dawn is already in the sky. No time for dreaming; there is far too much to do.

He takes the tympan down and studies it. It has guided his steps securely; in a sense, it has become a trusted friend. He lays it aside, picks it up again. Finally his decision is made. He strips it quickly from its frame, and lays it flat. With a pair of dividers he begins, carefully, to scribe the first of four small circles.

He sits with the little diaphragm in his hands. Once more it seems his purpose has been thwarted. The carbon grains, packed in behind, convey the electric fluid; but the fluctuations he had hoped for have been absent, shout at the thing as he might. He scratches his head, lays the device aside, picks it up again. Once more it seems a barrier has been reached. As one is thrown down so others rear ahead, each more unscaleable than the last.

The girl sighs. He has been like this now for days. Impossible to draw more than the odd word from him; and those for the most part make no sense. She glances at the window, the gloomy autumn sky. The shortening days afflict her with a sense of urgency. Many times now she has been tempted to pack her things. Always she has resisted. Together, they have been through much; she cannot leave him now. She wishes though, with intense longing, for the peace of the village again. She sees it in her mind, with dreamlike clarity; the pond, the old mill, the race that chuckles beneath, broadening to the stillness of the water.

The man looks up sharply. "What did you say?" he asks. "What was that, about the mill?"

She is startled, momentarily. "I'm sorry," she says. "I must have been thinking aloud."

He rises, begins to pace the room. Something about the mill race seems

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of critical importance. He too sees the water; quiet at first then furrowed, rushing faster as its energy is concentrated.

He picks the diaphragm up again. If he were to beat it, form a shallow cone; its tip, touching the carbon grains, would surely concentrate its force. As the mill race focuses the strength of water.

He frowns, fingering the thing. How to ensure transmission of that energy? How to make firm contact, with shifting, pulsing grains?

He hurries to the cupboard. Gold, purest of metals; only gold will suffice. He takes the pot down, feels inside. He looks up, stricken. It is empty.

The girl stares at him for a moment. Then she quietly draws the thick ring from her finger, places it on the table.

He hurries back, appalled. Not that, surely; not her mother's gift. He will not take it from her. But she shakes her head. She says, "I have no more need of it."

He takes the ring up, turns it in his fingers. He swallows. "When this is done," he says, "when this last thing is over, we will go away. Forever." He smiles. "Your dearest treasure for your dearest wish."

She looks up sharply. She knows, with strange certainty, that this time he is speaking the truth. The moment should be a joyous one; instead, it seems an icy hand has settled round her heart.

She stares at the strange box on the wall. From its front, a cone-shaped device juts forward like the black mouth of a trumpet. At the side, a similar contrivance hangs from a metal arm; coiled wires, each wrapped with cloth and paper, connect it to the machine. She steps back a little. She says, "What is it?"

He is excited, with an excitement she has not seen before. His hands shake; she feels the trembling as he takes her arm. "Come," he says. "I will show you."

He lifts the dangling object down. A little click sounds from somewhere. She takes the thing, unwillingly; and he laughs. The sound is high-pitched, and a little strained. "Place it to your ear," he says. "This is the part you talk to."

"Talk to?" she says. *"Talk to?"*

He whirls a little handle on the far side of the box. "Speak," he says. "Speak clearly, and do not be afraid."

She moistens her lips. "Hello?" she says stupidly. "Is anyone there?"

Becker-Margareth hears the scream from the kitchen. She waddles through hastily, her hands white with flour, pausing only to snatch up a cudgel; the house has known such disturbances before. She is in time to see the girl run desperately into the street. Her hands are to her ears,

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shutting out the demon voices. She understands now, knows what he has done; for who but demons speak from empty air?

The man pounds after her. "No," he shouts, "no, wait. Don't be afraid. It was only Heine, in the next room. Come back. . . ."

The demons are all round her now. The faces loom at her, their bulging eyes grotesque, their great tongues lolling. Her sleeve is caught; she screams again, pulls free. "No," says the demons, "come with us. Good times to be had, for a pretty one like you."

Drums bang, trumpets squawk; there are horses, dragons, beasts from vilest nightmare. There is a machine with rank on rank of painted pipes. Noise blasts from it; beside it the showman, also masked, whirls at a great spoked wheel. It is the Carnival; but she is not to know.

Her scarf has gone; her hair, light and lustrous, flies round her face, falls limp across her eyes. She stares up at the man who grips her; at the uniforms that crowd in close, the dark, set faces. "Come," says her captor. "We have been watching for some time. We think you have things to tell us."

There are other footsteps on the stairs. The inventor turns, distraught. The assistant's face is white to the lips. He hurries round the room, grabbing his belongings. "Save yourself," he says. "Run, while you still have legs. I can serve you no more."

His master grips his arm. "Where is she?" he asks, anguished. "I searched; but the crowds, the noise. . . ."

The young man wrenches away. "The police have her," he says. "What else did you expect? It was what they were waiting for. Now they are saying she is mad. . . ."

The other starts back, appalled. "The fault is mine," he cries. "Mine, and no other's." He begins to snatch up apparatus. "I will go to them," he says. "Then they will understand. Come with me, Heine; for you too can explain. . . ."

He turns; but the room is empty. The other has already fled. He makes for the door, encumbered by boxes and the trailing wires.

The sky glowers beyond the tall windows of the Council Chamber; an autumn light, flaring and yet dull. The *Oberlandvogt* stares out vaguely, brings his attention back unwillingly to the matter in hand. The Chamber is sparsely occupied. The Emperor's representative of course has shown no interest in the current affair; no rich pickings here, no great estates for seizure. The *Blutschoffen,* the Assistant Judges, seem to have found alternative duties, while the rest of the *Hexenausschuss* are likewise mysteriously absent.

He riffles the papers in his hands, coughs uncomfortably. "Undoubt-

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edly, the man is an eccentric," he says. "Perhaps he may even be mad." He attempts a smile. "Madmen are not necessarily all heretics," he says. "Or we should have a busy time indeed."

The emissary turns to stare. He says, "We shall be busy enough." He is a tall man, black browed and with colorless, cold eyes. Before their gaze, the *Oberlandvogt* quails. Despite his rich robes, the heavy chain of office, he is not an impressive figure; less so than ever now. He is dumpy and balding, beginning to sweat a little. "But," he says, "this talk of pacts with devils. . . ."

The other's voice is as cold as his demeanor. Cold, and pefectly modulated. "The matter seems clear enough to me," he says. "All magical practices effecting more than can reasonably be expected in nature imply a pact. Such an arrangement has therefore been made. These things have been known to us for generations."

The High Sheriff attempts to expostulate. "But the girl," he says. "A simple country girl. . . ."

The priest interrupts him. "The girl has already confessed," he says. "She has spoken with invisible demons. She stands condemned, out of her own mouth."

The other winces. Essentially, his is a kindly nature. "But," he says, "the things they will do. The things they will do to them both. . . ."

The cold voice once more breaks in. "We do nothing," says the emissary. "As you are well aware, *Herr Oberlandvogt.* For punishment, they will be handed to your own authorities. With, as ever, a plea for clemency."

The plump man nods unhappily. He is aware of the fact; as he is aware of others. Clemency is also viewed as the favoring of heretics; and heretic lovers can expect scant pity in a right-thinking world. Thus the Church, at all points, guards her flanks.

The priest rises, gathering his robes about him. "If a man abide not in me," he says, "he is cast forth as a branch; and men gather them and cast them into the fire and they are burned." He appears suddenly to lose patience. "Do you question my rights in this matter, Herr Rotensahe? Do you question my judgment?"

The *Oberlandvogt* spreads his arms, alarmed. "Naturally not. Naturally not, my Lord. . . ."

The other draws a parchment from his scrip. "It is not my will you answer to," he says. "It is the will of God. God, and His representative on earth." He spreads the scroll out, pointing; and the *Oberlandvogt* sees the Great Seal, the Mark that cannot be denied. Beside it, a scrawled signature. Claudio Aquaviva, Grand General of Jesuits; and the date. The Year of Our Lord 1589. The Inquisition has come to Germany.

He feels his shoulders sag. He swallows, moistens his lips with his

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tongue. "It shall be as you require," he says. "In all respects, we will be seen to do our duty."

He walks from the Chamber, and quietly closes the door.

He stands at the window of his office, high in the old *Rathaus*. Below him, the cobbled square bustles with activity. Some, the out-of-towners, have evidently come to gawk; others are more purposive. A cart passes, loaded high with faggots; beyond, men are busy erecting lines of stakes. There is a constant coming and going of priests and soldiers. And the police, of course; their sinister closed vehicles are everywhere.

The stocky man raises his eyes. Across the square the *Hexenturm,* the prison of the witches, looms darkly. Once, it was the lockup; a relatively mild place, almost homely now, where the local drunks and ne'er-do-wells could cool their heels. But the changing times brought trade to many folk; beside the Tower, masons are still working.

A side table holds a wine carafe and glasses. He had poured himself a cup, almost automatically; now though, the drink has lost its savor. He scowls at the carafe. Reflections burn dully within the crimson liquid.

He looks back to the Tower, the gloomy lines of windows. Almost he expects blood to ooze between the bars, as between the teeth of a wounded mouth.

He clenches his fists. He is surprised at the sudden passion that shakes him. This new Law, coming from the south; it offends him to the core, conflicts with every fiber of his being. Truth, logic, the burden of proof, are things of the past; now, accusation and guilt are one. Well, if justice, sanity itself, are swept aside as heathenish, so be it. A heathen he will remain; a heathen, and a Saxon.

The rage is gone as quickly as it arose. Once more he feels his body droop. He lays aside the chain of office, tiredly. For all his fineries, he knows himself to be a small man; small and insignificant, swept along by the red tide of events. He knows his courage would fail him. For his wife and children to walk into the Tower, to walk in himself. . . . He cannot bear the thought. As he knows he could never bear the pain.

He grabs the wine, drinks it down and dashes the glass away. *"Schmutzig,"* he mutters to himself. "A dirty, stinking business. . . ." He rings a handbell for his secretary to come. He stares at the papers spread before him; then he takes up a quill. *"Fiat justicia,"* he says. "Let justice be done." A stamp falls with a crash; and he sits back in his chair. He stares, unseeing, at the closing door. "There'll be trouble over this," he mutters. "One of these centuries. . . ."

The suspect is shown the instruments of the Questioning. He seems confused by them. Their purpose is explained, but he does not respond.

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He appears lost in some inner reverie. His only concern is for the girl. He explains that she is innocent, and that they must release her.

His hair is cropped, and he is placed on the Ladder. He is stripped, and searched for witch teats. The result is inconclusive.

Alcohol is brought. His hair is burned to the roots. The second examination is more successful. Several marks are found. When needles are applied to them he feels no extra pain.

He denies that he is a witch. Strips of sulphur are placed beneath his arms and set on fire. He makes his denial again. His arms are tied behind him, and he is hoisted by the wrists. No weights are used. The *Oberlandvogt* has expressed a wish that the captives be spared extremes of torture.

At zero nine thirty the Questioners go to breakfast. The magician remains suspended. On their return at eleven hundred hours his spirit is seen to have left him. He is revived with water and hot irons, and the *strappado* is employed again. He agrees he may have been a witch, but on being released recants. Alcohol is thrown onto his back and set alight. The *strappado* is used a third time, and the Questioners break for lunch.

At fourteen hundred hours, *gresillons* are applied to the magician's hands and feet. Later his calves are placed in the vice. For this purpose he is released from the pulley. He says again he may have employed spells, but afterward retracts a second time. He is placed back on the Ladder, and a plank with nails embedded pressed against his body.

The Questioners become impatient. He is hoisted up once more, this time with the weights. Squassation is decided on. His body is allowed to drop from near the ceiling. His arms are dislocated.

The accused of course must always confess. He signifies his willingness but indicates that he can no longer use a pen. This is of no importance; the document has already been prepared. He is asked when he first entered into pacts with demons. He states this was some twenty years before. He is asked where it took place. He says it was in the village where he was born. He is asked if the girl lived in the village. He says she was the daughter of a neighbor.

He is asked the names of the demons. His answers are difficult to make out. Balberith seems certain, and Verrine. Gressil is less clear, which is unfortunate. It is Gressil who is the author of impure thoughts. The name is added anyway, for the sake of completeness. He it must have been who made him lust for the girl. He says this is untrue, and that his love was pure.

He is told he must not lie, that she was his concubine. Also there were monstrous acts, performed with demons.

The accused exhibits signs of distress, rolling his head from side to side. He likens her to certain morning stars. He says she will go to

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Heaven, and not Hell. He repeats his request that she be instantly released.

This answer is not recorded, as being wholly blasphemous. The questions are repeated, but his responses are the same. Whips are brought; his body becomes bathed with blood.

The session is concluded at eighteen hundred hours. It has been a long day; the Questioners have earned their supper.

Next morning the interrogation is less rough. The Questioners have much experience in these matters; they know that once the answers have begun, the process becomes easier. The accused is asked the names of his accomplices. He says the innkeeper sometimes brought him food. He is asked if he means the woman Becker-Margareth. He says again that she sometimes brought him victuals.

The Questioners smile grimly, making more notes. Her case will be a simple one to prove; her aging body will be a rich source of Marks.

It has been stated a young boy was involved. The accused is asked his name. He says that it was Heinrich, but that he knew nothing of the work. He once more makes a plea for clemency.

The Questioners smile again. They ask if it was Heinrich who robbed the graves.

The magician seems surprised. He states that only one body was involved. He took the head, wishing to examine the bones of the inner ear.

The Questioners become intent. The subject is evidently beyond redemption. The lines of ticks extend themselves. *Affirmat* they write, over and again. The accused says yes.

They return to the subject of the girl. But on that alone that guilty one is obdurate. Her virtues are once more extolled. The magician seems much moved. At one point tears are seen to flow from his eyes.

The key question is reserved till last: He has stated she took no part in his affairs. Yet it is known she gave him gold, when his own supply was gone.

The accused rolls his head miserably. It was not to succor him, it was not for food. It was for the machines. He repeats once more his request that she be freed.

The Questioners are satisfied. The case is proved at last. They wish though to be certain beyond all doubt. Justice must be seen to be done. They become persuasive. He has confessed to having sex with devils, stated certain facts. They show him where it is written down. Their members were cold and painful, affording no pleasure. What was the girl's experience? Did it accord?

The accused is seen to struggle. It seems he attempts to rise, strike out. But his arms and legs already belong to Hell. The rest of him will shortly follow. The execution is fixed for seventeen thirty sharp.

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* * *

The sunlight batters at his eyelids. He sits atop a cart, his wrists and ankles once more bound. A part of him is puzzled as to why. He could not run away.

The sound in his ears is like the noise of the sea. Also his eyes seem weaker than before. He screws them up against the glare. He sees the people crowding round, the buildings to either side. Tall stakes have been set up by the *Schutting*. Round it the trees are gold with autumn. Bodies hang from them, each suspended by a leg.

He lifts his hands by inches, moves them closer to his face. At first the white bone showed; now it is crusted with dull red. He wonders that a part of him can still feel sorrow. His hands worked for him throughout his life; they will not function now.

The girl appears, in her vehicle. His heart gives a bound. Her upper vestment is black and neat, her hair falls softly to her shoulders. She has been saved; she has not known the fire, the hot irons. Then he sees the eyes of the man beside her, the gun pressed to her neck. He understands that death is still her portion.

The crowd boils round. Her eyes look straight ahead; it seems her gaze is fixed on another place.

The shouts coalesce. By degrees, one word comes to dominate. *"Hexenkonigen . . . Hexenkonigen. . . ."* She does turn at that. Her face is full of something that is almost wonder. "No," she says. "It is for my yellow hair. I kept it covered, as a decent woman should; but they found me out."

Suddenly the visions once more burn and hum within his mind. He sees what he has lost, what both of them have lost. He sees what might have been; the town, the countryside, the whole world laced with magic wires. He hears the people laugh and chatter; by the thousand, by the hundred thousand, by the million. "I could have saved them," he shouts, desperate. "Were I a better man. I could have saved you. Saved your voice, to float and ring on air. I could have saved you, Silke. . . ."

The Executioner moves forward, appalled by blasphemy. The magician's head drops to his chest; and the emissary nods grimly. The Devil does not like his secrets noised abroad; at seventeen twenty hours, he breaks the condemned man's neck. The priest makes a final mark on the clipboard he carries, tucks it beneath his arm. He turns on his heel, and is quickly lost in the crowd.

For three hundred years, the wires are silent by the will of God. While the world continues on its reeling way. Romanoff founds a dynasty in Russia; the first Prague Spring triggers thirty years of war. Magdeburg is sacked, America colonized. Richelieu rises to power, and England kills

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a king. Stenka Razin's severed head laughs at the Czar; by the Peace of Utrecht, the slave trade is cornered by the English. Persia wages war against the Moguls, and Cavendish proves hydrogen to be an element.

America breaks free of England; Charles and Montgolfier break free of earth. The Directory is established by a whiff of grape; and Boney goes to Egypt. The world's first steamship sails the Scottish Clyde, and Metternich restores the European Royals. Sadowa ensures the supremacy of Bismarck; Napoleon the Third is swept away, and Caesar's warring tribes become a nation.

The witches and their tormentors are long since gone. Spain, so feared and hated by the English, is the first to see the light. The Suprema orders the Questioners to their own racks; and everywhere men wake and rub their eyes. Round them, the Age of Reason has begun to dawn.

In 1860 Johann Reis, unsung and unremembered, begins experiments with membranes from the ears of pigs. In February of 1876, Alexander Graham Bell takes out Patent No. 174465 for the protection of a new device; his electric speaking telephone. A month later, his first transmitted sentence passes to history. "Watson, come here; I want you. . . ."

In 1879, the Reverend Henry Hunnings hits on the idea of treated carbon granules, to modulate the power supplied by batteries. And the inventor Watson devises a magneto cranked by hand. A year later, insulation is finally perfected; and New York City buries eleven thousand miles of wire. In 1959, aided by cable amplifiers, the voices finally plunge beneath the sea; today, the world owns half a billion handsets.

God has relented. ●

THE ASTRONAUT ADDRESSES HIS SHIP

You hold me, contingent, over a chasm
of color, like my father did, over
the Grand Canyon. Look here, and here, he said.
I stared into the blue of empty air,
and felt the terror of high places pressing,
a special kind of terror: when the world
seems jagged and hard and highly probable.

—Tony Daniel

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DISPATCHES FROM THE REVOLUTION

by Pat Cadigan

Pat Cadigan says she would like to tell everyone that *Synners*, her novel about virtual reality and rock 'n' roll, is out from Bantam along with a reissue of her first novel, *Mindplayers*, but being the mother to Kansas's answer to Bart Simpson keeps her so busy that, she has time only to mention that "Dispatches from the Revolution" will also appear in *Alternate Presidents*, edited by Mike Resnick and Martin Harry Greenberg.

Dylan was coming to Chicago.

The summer air, already electric with the violence of the war, the assassination attempts successful and unsuccessful, the anti-war riots, became super-charged with the rumor. Feeling was running high, any feeling about anything, real high, way up high, eight miles high and rising, brothers and sisters. And to top it all off, there was a madman in the White House.

Johnson, pull out like your father should have! The graffito of choice for anyone even semi-literate; spray paint sales must have been phenomenal that summer. The old bastard with a face like the dogs he lifted up by their ears would *not* give it up, step aside, and graciously bow to the inevitable. He wuz the Prezident, the gaw-damned Prezident, hear that, muh fellow Amurricans? *Dump Johnson, my ass, don't even* think *about it, boys, the one we ought to dump is that candy-assed Humphrey. Gaw-damned embarrassment is what he is.*

And the president's crazy, that's what he is, went the whispers all around Capitol Hill, radiating outward until they became shouts. Madman in the White House—the crazy way with LBJ! If you couldn't tell he was deranged by the way he was stepping up the bombing and the

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number of troops in Viet Nam, his conviction that he could actually stand against Bobby Kennedy clinched it. Robert F. Kennedy, sainted brother to martyred Jack, canonized in his own lifetime by an assassination attempt. Made by the only man in America who was obviously crazier than LBJ, frothed-up Arab with a name like automatic weapons fire, Sir*han* Sir*han*, ka-boom, ka-boom. The Golden Kennedy had actually assisted in the crazed gunman's capture, shoulder to shoulder with security guards and the Secret Service as they all wrestled him to the floor. Pity about the busboy taking that bullet right in the eye, but the Kennedys had given him a positively lovely funeral with RFK himself doing the eulogy. And, needless to say, the family would never want for anything again in this life.

But Johnson the Madman was going to run! Without a doubt, he was a dangerous psychotic. Madman in the White House—damned straight you didn't need a Weatherman to know the way the wind blew.

Nonetheless, there *was* one—after all, hadn't Dylan said the answer was blowin' in the wind? And if *he* was coming to Chicago to support the brothers and sisters, that *proved* the wind was about to blow gale force. Storm coming, batten down the hatches, fasten your seatbelts, and grab yourself a helmet, or steal a hardhat from some redneck construction worker.

Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement already had their riot gear. Seven years after the first freedom ride stalled out in Birmingham, the feelings of humiliation and defeat at having to let the Justice Department scoop them up and spirit them away to New Orleans for their own protection had been renewed in the violent death of the man who had preached victory through non-violence. He'd had a dream; the wake-up call had come as a gunshot. Dreaming was for when you were asleep. Now it was time to be wide-awake in America. . . .

Annie Phillips

"There were plenty of us already wide-awake in America by that late date. I'd been to Chicago back in '66, two years to the month in Marquette Park. If I was never awake any other day in my life before April '68, I was awake that day. Surrounded by a thousand of the meanest white people in America waving those Confederate flags and those swastikas, screaming at us. And then they let fly with rocks and bricks and bottles, and I saw when Dr. King took one in the head. I'd thought he was gonna die that day and all the rest of us with him. Well, he didn't and we didn't, but it was a near thing. After, the buses were pulling away and they were chasing us and I looked back at those faces and I thought, 'There's no hope. There's really no hope.'

"When Daley got the court order against large groups marching in the

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city, I breathed a sigh of relief, I can tell you. I felt like that man had saved my life. And then Dr. King says okay, we'll march in Cicero, it's a suburb, the order doesn't cover Cicero. *Cicero*. I didn't want to do it, I knew they'd kill us, shoot us, burn us, tear us up with their bare hands and teeth. Some of us were ready to meet them head-on. I truly believe that Martin Luther King would have died that day if Daley hadn't wised up in a hurry and said he'd go for the meeting at the Palmer House.

"Summit Agreement, yeah. Sell-Out Agreement, we called it, a lot of us. I think even Dr. King knew it. And so a whole bunch of us marched in Cicero anyway. I wasn't there, but I know what happened, just like everybody else. Two hundred dead, most of them black, property damage in the millions though I can't say I could ever find it in me to grieve for property damage over people damage. Even though I wasn't there, something of me died that day in Cicero and was reborn in anger. By '68, I had a good-sized bone to pick with good old Chi-town, old Daley-ville. I don't regret what I did. All I regret is that the bomb didn't get Daley. It had his name on it, I put it on there myself, on the side of the pipe. 'Richard Daley's ticket to hell, coach class.'

"Looking back on it, I think I might have had better luck as a sniper."

Excerpt from an interview conducted covertly
at Sybil Brand, published in
The Whole Samizdat Catalog, 1972?
exact date unknown

Veterans of the Free Speech Movement at Berkley also knew what they were up against. Reagan's tear-gas campaign against campus protestors drew praise from a surprising number of people who felt the Great Society was seriously threatened by the disorder promoted by campus dissidents. The suggestion that the excessive force used by the police caused more problems rather than solving any was rejected by the Reagan administration and its growing blue-collar following alike.

By the time Reagan assumed the governorship, he had already made up his mind to challenge Nixon in '68. But what he needed for a serious bid was the southern vote, which was divided between Kennedy and Wallace. Cleverly, the ex-movie actor managed to suggest strong parallels between campus unrest and racial unrest, implying that both groups were seeking the violent overthrow and destruction of the government of the United States. Some of the more radical rhetoric that came out of both the student left and the civil rights movement, and the fact that the student anti-war movement aligned itself with the civil rights movement, only seemed to validate Reagan's position.

That the southern vote would be divided between two individuals as disparate as Robert F. Kennedy and George C. Wallace seems bizarre

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to us in the present. But both men appealed to the working class, who felt left out of the American dream. Despite the inevitable trouble that Wallace's appearances resulted in, his message did reach the audience for which it was intended—the common man who had little to show for years, sometimes decades of hard work beyond a small piece of property and a paycheck taxed to the breaking point, and, as far as the common man could tell, to someone else's benefit. Wallace understood that the common man felt pushed around by the government and exploited this feeling. In a quieter era, he would have come off as a bigoted buffoon; but in a time when blacks and students were demonstrating, rioting, and spouting unthinkable statements against the government, the war, and the system in general, Wallace seemed to be one of the few, if not the only political leader who had the energy to meet this new threat to the American way of life and wrestle it into submission.

Some people began to wonder if McCarthy hadn't been right about Communist infiltration and subversion after all . . . and that wasn't Eugene McCarthy they were wondering about. By the time of the Chicago Democratic Convention, Eugene McCarthy had all but disappeared, his student supporters a liability rather than an asset. They undermined his credibility; worse, they could not vote for him, since the voting age at that time was a flat twenty-one for everyone. . . .

Carl Shipley

"I hadn't been around Berkley long when the Free Speech Movement started. Like, the university, Towle, Kerr, all of them were so out-to-lunch on what was happening with us. They thought they were dealing with Beaver Cleaver and his Little League team, I guess. And with us, it was, 'Guess what, Mr. Man, the neighborhood's changing, it ain't Beaver Cleaver any more, it's Eldridge Cleaver and Wally just got a notice to report for his physical and maybe he doesn't want to go get his ass shot off in southeast Asia and maybe we've had enough of this middle-American conservative bullshit.' That's why they wanted to shut down Bancroft Strip. That was the first place I went to see when I got there and it was just like everybody said, all these different causes and stuff, the Young Republicans hanging in right along with the vegetarians and the feminists and people fund-raising for candidates and I don't know what-all.

"So we all said, *fuck* this shit, you ain't closing *us* down, we're closing *you* down. And we did it, we closed the university down. We had the power and we kept it—and then in comes Ronald Reagan two years later in '66 and he says, Relax, Mr. and Mrs. America, the cavalry's here. I know you're worried about the Beave, but I've got the solution.

"He sure did. By spring 1968, a lot of campus radio stations all over

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California were off the air and the campus newspapers were a joke. No funding, see. And by then, everyone was too sick of the smell of tear gas to fight real hard. That was Reagan's whole thing—sit-ins and take-overs weren't covered by the right of free assembly, they were criminal acts. Unless you had to be in a building for a class, you were trespassing. I got about a mile of trespassing convictions on my rap sheet and so do a lot of other people. And Mr. and Mrs. America, they were real impressed the way Reagan came down on the troublemakers.

"Sure were a lot of troublemakers. Too many to keep track of. That's what happened to me, you know. Got lost in the court system. The next thing I knew, it was 1970, and nobody remembered my name, except the guards. And they could remember my number a lot easier. Still can.

"The thing is, I *never* burned my draft card. That was a frame-up. I wouldn't have burned it. I was ready to go to Canada, but I intended to keep my draft card. As a reminder, you know. And not even my parents believed me. By then, I'd been into so much radical shit, they figured everything the pigs said about me was true.

"But the fact is, everything I owned was in that building when it burned. So of course my draft card burned up with it! But *I* never set that fire. My court-appointed lawyer—this is me laughing bitterly—said if I told my 'crazy story' about seeing off-duty cops with gasoline cans running from the scene just before the explosion, the judge would tack an extra five years on my sentence for perjury. I should have believed him, because it was the only time anyone told me the truth.

Interview conducted at
Attica, published in
Orphans of the Great Society,
Fuck The System Press,
197?
(circulated illegally in photocopy)

Some say, even today, that Reagan wouldn't have taken such an extremist path if Wallace hadn't been such a strong contender. Nixon's mistake was in dismissing Wallace's strong showing, choosing to narrow his focus to the competition within his own party for the nomination. This made him look dinky, as if he didn't care as much about being President as he did about being the Republican candidate for President. That would show those damned reporters that they couldn't kick around Dick Nixon, uh-*huh*. Even if he lost, they'd have to take him seriously; if he actually won, they'd have to take him even more seriously. Which made him look not only dinky, but like a whiner—the kind of weak sister who, for example, might stand up in front of a television camera and rant about cocker spaniel puppies and good Republican cloth coats, instead of telling

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the American people that rioting, looting, and draft-card burning would no longer be tolerated. Even Ike's coattails weren't enough to repair Nixon's image, and Ike himself was comatose or nearly so in Walter Reed after a series of heart attacks.

The Republican National Convention was notable for three things: Rockefeller's last minute declaration of candidacy, which further diluted Nixon's support, the luxuriousness of the accommodations and facilities, and its complete removal from the rioting that had broken out in Miami proper, where an allegedly minor racial incident escalated into a full-scale battle. The convention center was in Miami Beach, far from the madding Miami crowd, a self-contained playground for the rich. You couldn't smell the tear gas from Miami Beach, and the wind direction was such that you couldn't hear the sirens that screamed all night long . . .

"Carole Feeney" [this subject is still a fugitive]

"I told everybody it was the goddam fatcat Republicans that we ought to go after, not the Democrats. But Johnson the Madman was running and everyone really thought that he was going to get the nomination. I said they were crazy, Kennedy had it in the bag. But Johnson really had them all running scared. I tried talking to some of the people in the Mobe. Half of them didn't want to go to either convention and the other half were trying to buy *guns* to take to Chicago! Off the pigs, they kept saying. Off the pigs. Jesus, I thought, the only pig that was going to get offed was Pigasus—the real pig that the Yippies were going to announce as the candidate from the Youth International Party. That was cute. I mean, really, it was. I said, let's go ahead and do that somewhere in California, film it and send the film to a TV station and let them run it on the news. Uh-uh, nothing doing. Lincoln Park or bust. Yeah, right—Lincoln Park *and* bust. Busted heads, busted bodies, busted and thrown in jail.

"So I wasn't going to go. Then I found out what Davis was doing. I couldn't believe it—Davis Trainor had been in on everything practically from the beginning. He was real good-looking and real popular, he had this real goofy sense of humor and he always seemed to come up with good ideas for guerrilla action. He actually did all the set-up work on the pirate radio station we ran out of Oakland and he worked out our escape routes. Not one of us got caught in the KCUF caper. We called it our Fuck-You caper, of course.

"Then I'm doing the laundry and I find it—his COINTELPRO I.D.—stuffed into that little bitty pocket in his jeans. You know, it's like a little secret pocket right above the regular pocket on the right. The one thing I always hated about the movement was that it was as sexist

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as the Establishment. If you were a woman, you always got stuck doing all the cooking and the cleaning up and the laundry and stuff. Unless you were a movement queen like Dohrn. Then you didn't have to do anything except make speeches and get laid if you wanted. Oh, they threw us a sop by letting us set up our own feminist actions and stuff, but we all knew it was a sop. We kept telling each other that after we changed things, it would be different and for now, we'd watch and listen and learn. Besides, everyone knew that the Establishment wouldn't take women as seriously as they would men. I wonder now how much any of us believed that—that it would really be different, that we could change things at all.

"Anyway, I went straight to the Mobe with my discovery, but it was too late—Davis discovered his pants were missing and he'd already split. I *really* didn't want to go to Chicago after that, but the alternative seemed to be either stay home and wait to get busted, or go to Chicago and get busted in action. I was still enough of an idealist that they talked me into Chicago. If I was going to get busted, I might as well be accomplishing something, and anyway, after the revolution, I'd be a National Heroine, and not a political prisoner.

"So, the revolution's come and gone and here I am. Still working for the movement—the feminist movement, that is. What little I *can* do, referring women with unwanted pregnancies to safe abortionists. Yes, there *are* some. Not all of us were polysci majors—some of us were pre-med, some of us went to nursing school. It costs a goddam fortune, but *I'm* not getting rich on it. It's for the risk, you know. You get the death penalty in this state for performing an illegal abortion. I could get life as an accessory, and there was a woman in Missouri who *did* get death for doing what I'm doing.

"Nobody in my family knows, of course. Especially not my husband. If *he* knew, he'd probably kill me himself. Odd as it sounds, I don't hate him . . . not when I think what good cover he is, and what the alternative would be if I didn't have such good cover . . ."

Part of a transcript labeled "Carole Feeney" obtained in a 1989 raid on a motel said to be part of a network of underground "safe houses" for tax protestors, leftist terrorists, and other subversives; no other illegal literature recovered

The source of the DYLAN IS COMING! rumor never was pinpointed. Some say it sprang into being all on its own and stayed alive because so many people wanted it to be true. And for all anyone knows, perhaps

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it actually was true, for a little while anyway; perhaps Dylan simply changed his mind. The more cynical suggested that the rumor had been planted by infiltrators like the notorious Davis Trainor, whose face became so well-known thanks to the Mobe's mock wanted poster that he had to have extensive plastic surgery, a total of a dozen operations in all. The poster was done well enough that it passed as legitimate and was often allowed to hang undisturbed in post offices, libraries, and other public places, side by side with the FBI's posters of dissidents and activists. One poster was found in a Minneapolis library as late as 1975; the head librarian was taken into custody, questioned, and released. But it is no coincidence that the library was audited for objectionable material soon after that and has been subject to surprise spot checks for the last fifteen years, in spite of the fact that it has always showed 100 percent compliance with government standards for reading matter. The price of a tyrant's victory is eternal vigilance.

This was once considered to be the price of liberty. Nothing buys what it used to.

Steve D'Alessandro

"By Sunday, when Dylan didn't show, people were starting to get angry. I kept saying, well, hey, Allen Ginsburg showed. Allen Ginsburg! Man, he was like . . . *God* to me. He was doing his best, going around rapping with people, trying to get everybody calmed down and focused, you know. A whole bunch of us got in a circle around him and we were chanting Om, Om. I was getting a really good vibe and then some asshole throws a bottle at him and yells, Oh, shut up, you fag!

"I went crazy. Sure, I was in the closet then because the movement wasn't as enlightened as some of us wished it were. The FBI was doing this thing where it was going around trying to discredit a lot of people by accusing them of being queer, and everybody caught homophobia like it was measles. I ain't no fairy, no, sir, not *me,* I fucked a hundred chicks this week and my dick's draggin' on the ground so don't you call *me* no fag! It still stings, even when I compare it to how things are now. But then, I don't expect any kind of enlightened feeling in a society where I have to take fucking hormone treatments so I won't get a hard-on when I see another guy.

"Anyway, I found the scumbag that did it and I punched him out. I gave *him* a limp wrist. I gave *him two* of them. And I know I had a lot of support—I mean, a lot of straights admired Ginsburg, too, even if he was gay, just on the basis of *Howl,* but later, a bunch of Abbie's friends blamed me for creating the disturbance that gave the police the excuse they needed to wade in and start busting heads.

"Sometimes I'm afraid maybe they were right. But Annie Chambers

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told me it was just a coincidence. About me, I mean. She said they came in because they saw a black guy kissing a white girl. I guess nobody'll ever really know for sure, because the black guy died of his injuries and the white girl never came forward.

"I prefer to think that's what made Annie and her crowd go ahead with the bomb at the convention center. I don't like to think that Annie really wanted to blow anybody up. It was kind of weird how I knew Annie. Well, not weird, really. I probably owed Annie my life, or damn near, and so did a certain man of African-American descent. We were lucky it was her that walked in on us that day. She was enlightened, or at least tolerant, and we could trust her not to say anything. I didn't think she liked white people too much, but I'd heard she'd been with Martin Luther King a couple of years before on those marches and I couldn't blame her. Anyway, she couldn't give me away without giving away the brother, but to this day, I believe it really didn't matter to her—homosexuality, that is. Maybe because the Establishment hated us worse than they hated blacks.

"Anyway, I wasn't intending to be in the crowd that crashed the gate at the convention center on Wednesday. Nomination day. We'd been fighting in the streets since Monday and Daley's stormtroopers were beating the shit out of us. Late Tuesday night, the National Guard arrived. That's when we knew it was war.

"On Wednesday, we got hemmed in in Grant Park. People were pouring in by then, and nobody had expected that. It was like everyone was standing up to be counted because Dylan hadn't, or something. Anyway, there were maybe ten–twelve thousand of us at the band shell in the park, singing, listening to speeches, and then two kids went up a flagpole and lowered the flag to half-mast. The cops went crazy—they came in swinging wild and they didn't care who they hit or where they hit them. I was scared out of my mind. I saw those cops close up and they looked as mad as Johnson was supposed to be. On the spot, I became a believer like I'd never been before—Madman in the White House and Madman Daley and his Madman cops. It was all true, I thought while I curled up on the ground with my hands over my head and prayed some kill-crazy pig wouldn't decide to pound my ass to jelly.

"Somebody pulled me up and yelled that we were supposed to all go to in front of the Hilton. I ran like hell all the way to the railroad tracks along with everybody else and that was where the Guard caught us with the tear gas. Man, I thought I was going to die of tear-gas suffocation if I didn't get trampled by the people I was with. Everyone was running around like crazy. I don't know how we ever got out of there but somebody found a way onto Michigan Avenue and somehow we all followed. And

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the Guard followed after us. Somebody said later they weren't supposed to, but they did. And they weren't carrying pop-guns.

"Well, we ran smack into Ralph Abernathy and his Poor People's Campaign mule train and that was more confusion. Then the Guard waded in and a lot of Poor People went to the hospital that night (it was after seven by then). I'll never forget that, or the sight of all those TV cameras and the bright lights shining in our eyes. We were all staggering around when a fresh busload of riot cops arrived, and that's another sight I'll never forget—two dozen beefy bruisers in riot gear shooting out of that bus like they were being shot from cannons and landing on all of us with both feet and their billyclubs. I lost my front teeth and I was so freaked I didn't even feel it until the next day.

"I was freaked, but I was also furious. We were all furious. It was like, Johnson would send us to Viet Nam to be killed or he'd let us be killed by Daley's madman cops on the Chicago streets, it didn't matter to him. I think a lot of us expected the convention to adjourn in protest at our treatment. At least that Bobby Kennedy would speak out in protest against the brutality. The name Kennedy *meant* human rights, after all. Nobody knew that Kennedy had been removed from the convention center under heavy guard because they were all convinced that someone would make another attempt on his life. I heard that later, before they clamped down on all the information. He was about to get the fucking *nomination* and he was on his way back to his hotel. They said Madman Johnson was more like Mad-Dog Johnson over that, but who the fuck knows?

"George McGovern was at the podium when we busted in. I hadn't really been intending to be in that group that busted in, but I got carried along and when I saw we were going to crash the amphitheatre, I thought, what the fuck.

"I almost got crushed against the doors before they gave, and I barely missed falling on my face and getting run over by six thousand screaming demonstrators. And the first person I saw was Annie Chambers.

"I thought I was in a Fellini film. She was dressed in this godawful *maid's* uniform with a handkerchief around her head mashing down her Afro, but I knew it was her. We looked right into each other's eyes as I went by, still more carried along with the crowd than running on my own and she put both hands over her mouth in horror. That was the last time I saw her until she was on TV.

"I managed to get out of the way and stay to the back of the amphitheatre itself. I just wanted to catch my breath and try to think how I was going to get out of all this shit without getting my head split open by a crazy Guardsman or a cop. I was still there when the bomb went off down front.

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"The sound was so loud I thought my ears were bleeding. Automatically, I dropped to the floor and covered my head. There was a little debris, not much, where I was. When I finally dared to look, what I saw didn't make any sense. I still can't tell you exactly what I saw. I blocked it out. But sometimes, I think I dream it. I dream that I saw Johnson's head sitting on a Texas flagpole. I'm pretty sure that's just my imagination, because in the dream, he's got this vaguely surprised-annoyed expression on his saggy old face, like he's saying, *Whut the fuck* is goin' *on here?*

"Anyway, the next thing I knew, I was out on the street again, and somebody was crying about they were bombing *us* now, along with the Viet Namese. Which was about the time the Guard opened fire, thinking *we* were bombing *them,* I guess.

"I was lucky. I took a bullet in my thigh and it put me out of action. Just a flesh wound, really. It bled pretty impressively for a while and then quit. By then, I was so out of my head that I can't even tell you where I staggered off to. The people who found me in their front yard the next morning took care of me and got me to a hospital. It was a five-hour wait in the emergency room. That was where I was when I heard about Kennedy."

Part of the data recovered
from a disk
taken in a raid on an illegal
software laboratory,
March, 1981

Jack Kennedy had died in the middle of a Dallas street, his head blown off in front of thousands of spectators and his horrified wife. Bobby Kennedy had narrowly missed meeting his end during a moment of triumph in a Los Angeles hotel. Ultimately, that seemed to have been only a brief reprieve before fate caught up with him . . .

Jasmine Chang

"Everyone heard the explosion but nobody knew whether it was something the demonstrators had done, or if the National Guard had rolled in a tank, or if the world had come to an end. I ran down to the lobby with just about everyone else on the staff and a good many of the hotel guests, trying to see what was happening outside without having to go out in it. Nobody wanted to go outside. That night, the manager on duty had told us that anyone who wanted could stay over if we didn't mind roughing it in the meeting rooms. I made myself a sleeping bag out of spare linens under a heavy table in one of the smaller rooms. The night before, the cops had cracked one of the dining room windows with a

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demonstrator's head. I wasn't about to risk my neck going out in that frenzy.

"Well, after the explosion, we heard the rifle fire. Then the street in front of the hotel, already crowded, was *packed* all of a sudden. Wall-to-wall cops and demonstrators, and the cops were swinging at anything they could reach. They were *scything* their way through the crowd, you see—they were mowing people down to make paths so they could walk. It was one of the worst things I've ever seen. For awhile it was *the* worst. I wish it could have stayed that way.

"The lobby was filling up, too, but nobody really noticed because we were all watching that sickening scene outside. The whole world was watching, they said. I saw a camera crew and all I could think was their equipment was going to get smashed to bits.

"I don't know when Kennedy came down to the lobby. I don't know why the Secret Service didn't stop him, I don't know what he thought he could do. He must have been watching from his window. Maybe he thought he could actually address the crowd—as if anyone could have heard him. Anyway, he was there in the lobby and none of us really noticed him.

"The demonstrator who forced his way into the revolving door—he was just a kid, he looked about fifteen years old to me. Scared out of his mind. The revolving door was supposed to be locked, but when I saw that kid's face, I was glad it wasn't.

"Then the cops tried to force their way in after him but they got stuck, there was a billyclub jammed in the door or something. And the kid was babbling about how they'd blown up Kennedy at the convention. 'They threw a bomb and killed Kennedy! They blew him up with Johnson and McGovern!' he was yelling over and over. And Bobby Kennedy himself rushed over to the kid. I'm pretty sure that was the first any of us really noticed him, when it registered. I remember, I felt shocked and surprised and numb all at once, seeing Kennedy right *there,* right in the middle of a lobby. Like he was anybody. And nobody else moved, we all just stood there and stared like dummies.

"And Kennedy was trying to tell the kid who he was, that he wasn't dead and what bomb and all that. The kid got even more hysterical, and Kennedy was shaking him, trying to get something coherent out of him, we're all standing there watching and finally the cops manage to get through the revolving door.

"They must have thought the kid was attacking Kennedy. That's all I can figure. Even if that's not how they looked. The cops. They looked . . . *weird.* Like they didn't know what they were doing, or they did know but they'd forgotten why they were supposed to do it. I don't know. I don't *know.* But it was so weird, because they all looked exactly alike to

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me right at that moment, even though when I looked at them again after, they weren't anything alike, even in their uniforms. But they looked like identical dolls then, or puppets, because they moved all at once together. Like a kick-line of chorus girls, you know? Except that it wasn't their legs that came up but their arms.

"I know that when they raised their guns, they were looking at the kid, and I thought, 'No, wait!' I tried to move toward them, I was reaching out and they fired.

"It was like another bomb *had* gone off. For a moment, I thought another bomb had gone off, just a split second before they were going to fire. Then John Kennedy—I mean, Bobby, *Bobby* Kennedy—that's a Freudian slip, isn't it?—he did this clumsy whirl around and it looked like he was turning around in anger, like people do sometimes, you know? Like he was going, 'Dammit, I'm leaving!' And then he went down, and it was so awful because—well, this is going to sound really strange, I guess, but . . . well . . . when you see people get shot on a TV show, it's choreographed or something, they do these kind of graceful falls. Kennedy was . . . they'd robbed him of his dignity. That's the only way I can think to put it. They shot him and humiliated him all at once, he looked clumsy and awkward and helpless.

"And I was outraged at that. I know it must sound weird, a man got shot, *killed,* and I'm talking about how he looked undignified. But that's like what taking someone's life is—taking their humanity, making them a *thing.* And I was outraged. I wanted to grab one of those cops' guns and make *them* into *things.* Not just because it was Bobby Kennedy, it could have been anyone on that floor at that moment, the kid, the manager, my supervisor—and I hated my supervisor's guts.

"Right then, I understood what the demonstrations were about, and I was against the war. Up until then, I'd been kind of for it—not really *for* it, more like, 'I hate war, but you're supposed to serve your country.' But right then, I understood how horrifying it must be to be told to make somebody into a thing, or be told you have to go out and risk being made into a thing. To kill, to be killed.

"All that went through my mind in a split second and then I started screaming. Then I heard this *noise* . . . under my screams, I heard this weird groan. It was Kennedy. They say he was dead by then and it must have been the air going out of his lungs past his vocal cords that made the sound. Awful. Just awful. I ran and pulled the fire alarm. It was the only thing I could think to do. And this other chambermaid, Lucy Anderson, she started pounding on the front windows and screaming, 'Stop! Stop! They killed Kennedy! They killed Kennedy!' Probably nobody could hear her, but even if anyone had, it wouldn't have mattered, because

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most of the people out there thought Kennedy was already dead in the explosion.

"It wasn't the Fire Department that used the hoses on those people. The cops commandeered the fire trucks and did that. And we were stuck in that hotel for another whole day and night. Even after they cleared the streets, they wouldn't let any of us go anywhere. Like house arrest.

"The questioning was awful. Nobody mistreated me or hit me or anything like that, it was just that they kept *at* me. I had to tell what I saw over and over and over and over until I thought they were either trying to drive me out of my mind so I wouldn't be able to testify against those cops, or trying to find some way to make it seem like *I* was really the one who'd done it.

"By the time they told me I could leave the hotel, I was mad at the world, I can tell you. Especially since that Secret Service agent or whoever he was told me I'd be a lot happier if I moved out of Chicago and started over somewhere else. He really screwed that one up, and it was lucky for me he did. I left, and I was far, far away when the shit really hit the fan. I started over, all right—I got a new name and a new identity. Everybody else who was in that lobby—Lucy Anderson, the manager, the other staff and guests—they all disappeared. The last anyone saw of them, the Secret Service was taking them away. The cops vanished, too, but I have a feeling they didn't vanish to quite the same thing as the others. And the kid killed himself. *They* said. Right, sure. I bet he couldn't survive the interrogation.

"Of course, all that was a long time ago. Hard to imagine now how things were then. I was only twenty, then. I was working days and taking college courses at night. I wanted to be a teacher. Now I'm in my early forties, and sometimes I think I dreamed it all. I dreamed that I lived in a country where people *voted* their leaders into office, where you just had to be old enough and not be a convicted felon and you could vote. Instead of having to take those psychological tests and wait for the investigators to give you a voting clearance. It *is* like a dream, isn't it? Imagining that there was a time in this country when you could *be* anything you wanted to be, a teacher, a doctor, a banker, a scientist. I was going to be a teacher. I was going to be a history teacher, but those are mostly white people. My family's been in this country forever, but because I'm Oriental, I've got conditional citizenship now . . . and I was *born* here! I suppose I shouldn't complain. If anyone found out I saw Kennedy get it, I'd probably be unconditionally *dead*. Because *everyone knows* that the rumor that Kennedy was shot by some cops with a bad aim in a hotel lobby is just another stupid rumor, like the second gunman in Dallas in 1963. Everyone knows Kennedy died in the explosion at the

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convention center. That's the official version of how he died and it's the official version, government certified, that's the truth.

"Where I live, they have routine segregation, so I can't use any of the whites' facilities. I've thought about applying to move to one of the larger cities where there's elective segregation and nothing's officially 'white-only,' but I hear the waiting lists are years long. And somebody told me that everything is really just as segregated as here, they're just not as open and honest about it. So maybe I'd really be no better off . . .

"But I wish that I could have become a teacher—any kind of teacher—instead of a cook. I can't even become a chef, because that's another men-only field. I don't *want* to be a chef necessarily, because I really don't like to cook and I'm not very good at it. But it was all I could get. The list of available careers for non-whites gets smaller all the time.

"Sometimes, I think it actually wasn't meant to be this bad. Sometimes I think that nobody really wanted the military to take over the government for real, I think it was just panic about so many of the Democratic candidates dying along with the President in that blast and the rioting that wouldn't stop and all that. It did seem as if the country was completely falling apart and somebody had to do something fast and decisive. Well, sure somebody should have. Somebody should have figured out who was the president with Madman Johnson and Humpty Humphrey and all those senators dead—there had to be somebody left, right? All of Congress wasn't there. I mean, if I'd known, if a lot of us had known how things were going to come out, I think we'd have just let Ronald Reagan be president for four years, run him against Wallace or something and kept free elections, instead of postponing the elections and then having them abolished.

"People panicked. That's what it all came down to, I think. They were panicking in the streets, they were panicking in the government, and they were panicking in their homes. Our own panic brought us down."

Undated typescript found in
a locker in the downtown
San Diego bus terminal,
April 9, 1993

Our own panic brought us down. For many who were eyewitness to certain events of 1968, this would seem to be a fitting coda, if coda is the word, for the ensuing twenty-five years . . .

Oh, hell, I don't know why I'm bothering to try to sum this up. How do you sum up a piece of history gone wrong? How do you sum up the fall of a country that believes it was saved from chaos and destruction? And who am I asking, anyway? I'm out of the country now, another wetback who finally made it across the border to freedom. There was a

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time when wetbacks went north to freedom, but I'm pretty sure nobody would remember that now. Mexico is sad and dusty and ancient, the people poor and suspicious of Anglos, though I'm so brown now that I can pass convincingly as long as I don't try to speak the language—my accent is still atrocious.

But the freedom here—nothing like what we used to have, but the constraints are far fewer. You don't need to apply for a travel permit in-country, you just *go* from place to place. Of course, it's not really that hard to get a travel permit in the US, they give them out routinely. But I'm of that generation that remembers when it was different, and it galls me that I would have to apply for one at all if I want to go from, say, Newark to, say, Cape May. I've deliberately chosen two cities I've never been to, just in case these papers fall into the wrong hands. God knows enough of my papers have been lost over the years. Sometimes I think it's a miracle I haven't been caught.

It's a hell of a life when you're risking prosecution and imprisonment just for trying to put together a true account of something that happened two and a half decades before.

Why I bothered—well, there are a lot of reasons. Because I've learned to love truth. And because I want to atone for what I did to "Carole Feeney" and the others. I'm still amazed that she didn't recognize me, but I guess twenty-five years is a long time after all.

I really thought I was doing the right thing at the time. I thought infiltrating the leftist groups was all right if it was just to make sure that nobody was stockpiling weapons or planning to blow up a building. Or assassinate another leader. I truly wish I could have arrested Annie Phillips and her group long before Chicago. Some of the people I talked to who were in the streets that night blame Annie for everything that's happened since, and I think that's why the authorities kept her alive instead of killing her—so the old radicals could hate her more than the government.

After I talked to Annie, I understood why she turned violent, even if I didn't condone it. If her voice could have been heard in 1964, maybe all these voices could be heard now, though they might not have so much to say . . .

How melodramatic, "Davis." I can't help it. I was actually just like any of them in the year 1968—I thought my country was in trouble, and I was trying to do something about it. And—

And what the hell, we won the Viet Nam war. Hooray for America. The Viet Namese are all but extinct, but we brought the boys back home. We sent them right back out to the Middle East, and then down to Nicaragua, and to the Phillipines, and to Europe, of course, where they don't protest our missile bases much any more. That big old stick. We've gone

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one better than talking softly and carrying a big stick. Now we don't talk at all . . .

In the weeks since I finally got out of the country, I've been having this recurring dream. I keep dreaming that things turned out differently, that there was even just *one* thing that didn't happen, or something else that *did* happen, and the country just . . . went on. And so I keep thinking about it. If Johnson hadn't run . . . if no one had been killed in Cicero four years before . . . if Reagan hadn't used so much force on campus. If someone hadn't thrown a bottle at Allen Ginsberg. If that bomb hadn't gone off . . . if Kennedy hadn't been killed. . . . if Dylan had showed up.

If Dylan had showed up . . . I wonder sometimes if that's it. God, the world should be so simple. Instead of simple and brutal and crude.

Even after putting together this risky account, I'm not sure that I really know much more than I did in the beginning. I was hoping that I might figure it all out, how, instead of winning the battle and losing the war, we won the war and lost everything we had.

But it could have been different. I don't know why it's so important to me to believe that. Maybe because I don't want to believe that this was the way we were going no matter what. I don't want to believe that everything that was of any value is stuck back there in the 60s.

Papers found in a hastily vacated room
in an Ecuadorian flophouse by occupying
American forces during the third
South American War, October 13, 1998 ●

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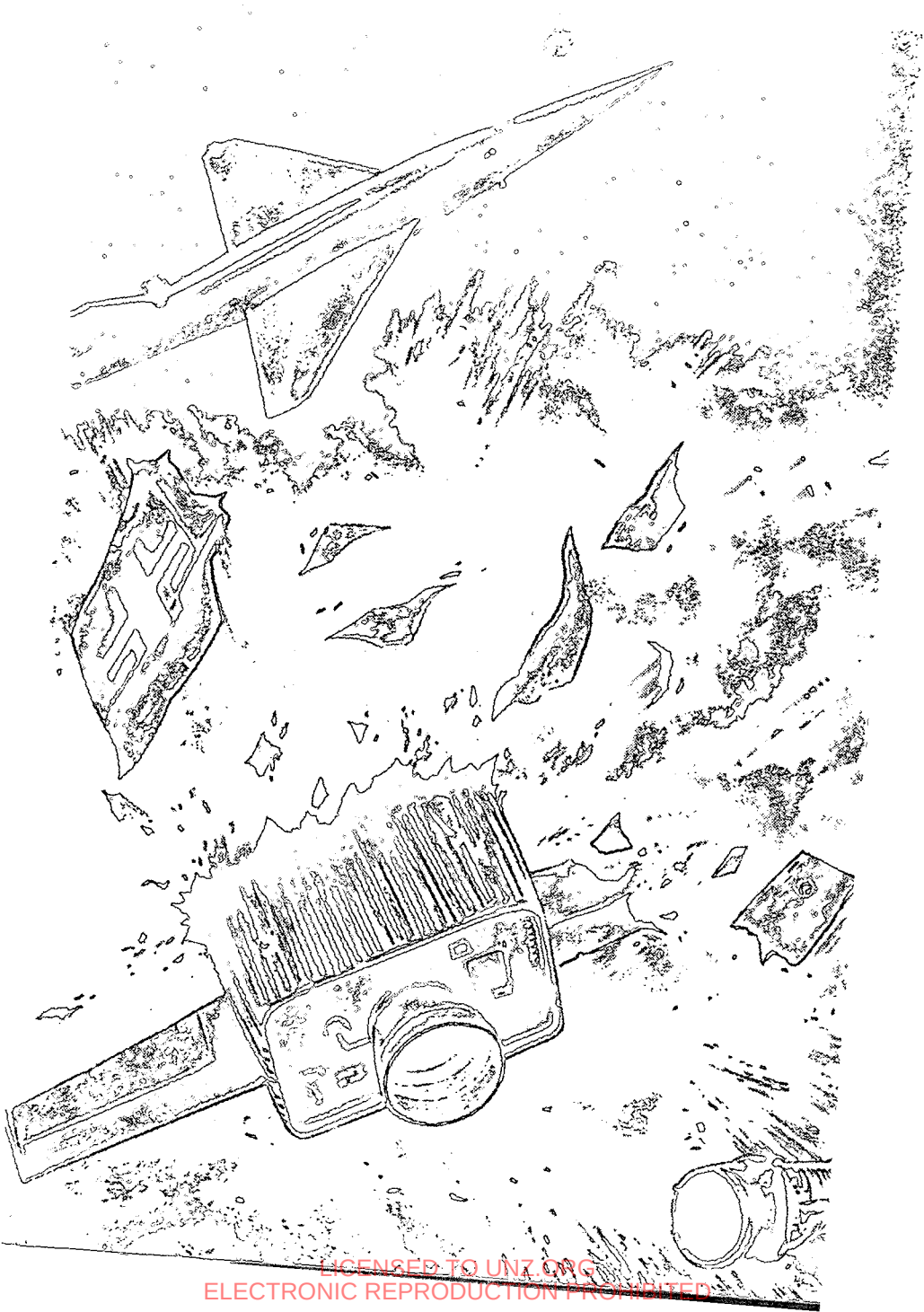

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GODDARD'S PEOPLE

by Allen Steele

"Goddard's People" is a prequel to the author's earlier story, "John Harper Wilson" (*IAsfm*, June 1989). It was inspired by a pilgrimage to the site of Robert H. Goddard's first successful rocket launch in Auburn, Massachusetts.

art: Bob Walters

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A morning in wartime: May 24, 1944, 5:15 A.M. PST. Day is barely breaking over the California coastline; for the crew of the B-24 Liberator *Hollywood Babe*, it's the fifth hour of their mission. The bomber has been holding a stationary position since midnight over the ocean southeast of the Baja Peninsula, flying in narrow circles at 25,000 feet. Their classified mission has been simple: watch the skies. The vigil is about to end.

Gazing through the cockpit windows, the captain notices a thin white vapor trail zipping across the dark purple sky. Many miles above and due west of his plane's position, the streak is hopelessly out of the *Hollywood Babe's* range, even if the bomber was ordered to intercept the incoming object. Becoming alert, he glances over his shoulder at the civilian in the jump seat behind him.

"Sir, is that what you're looking for?" the captain asks.

The civilian, an agent of the Office of Strategic Services, quickly leans forward and stares at the streak. "Son of a bitch," he murmurs under his breath. For a moment he can't believe what he's seeing. Only yesterday he had been telling someone that MI-6 must be getting shell-shocked, because now they were sending science fiction yarns to the OSS. But, incredible or not, this was exactly what the OSS man had been told for which to watch.

He turns to the radio man in the narrow compartment behind the cockpit. "Sergeant, alert White Sands now!" he yells over the throb of the B-24's engines. "It's on its way!"

Many miles away, warning Klaxons howl at a top-secret U.S. Army facility in the New Mexico desert. Around a spotlighted launch pad, technicians and engineers scurry away from the single-stage, seventy-five-foot winged silver rocket poised on the pad. Cold white oxygen fumes venting from the base of the rocket billow around the steel launch tower. The gantry is towed back along railroad tracks by a locomotive, and fuel trucks race away to a safe distance where the ground crew and several soldiers wait, their eyes fixed on the pad.

In a concrete blockhouse four hundred yards from the launch pad, more than a dozen men are monitoring the launch. Among them, nine civilian scientists are hunched over control panels, anxiously watching hundreds of dials and meters as they murmur instructions to each other. In the middle of the blockhouse a frail, scholarly man peers through a periscope at the launch pad as the countdown reaches the final sixty seconds.

For more than two years, these ten men have worked toward this moment; now, in the last minute, most of them are scared half to death. If the launch is unsuccessful, there will be no second chance. If the rocket blows up, as so many other rockets have before it, the Navy pilot inside the machine will die. But far worse than that, New York City, thousands

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of miles to the east, will suffer a devastating attack. An eighty-ton incendiary bomb will drop into the middle of Manhattan, and there will be nothing in heaven or earth to stop it. If the launch is successful, it will be the crowning achievement of American technology; if it fails, it may be the beginning of the end for free society. The stakes are that high.

"Ten . . . nine . . . eight . . . " an Army officer recites tonelessly. Staring through the periscope, Robert Hutchings Goddard absently wipes his sweaty palms against the rubber grips and silently begins to pray. . . .

Forty-seven years ago, in the early morning hours of a summer day in World War II, a huge rocket called the A-9—the *Amerika Bomber*—hurtled down a horizontal track in Germany and climbed to the highest altitude ever achieved, 156 miles above the earth. Horst Reinhart, a young Luftwaffe lieutenant, became the first man in space. One hour and thirty-six minutes later, the rocket christened the *Lucky Linda* blasted off from New Mexico, and U.S. Navy pilot Rudy "Skid" Sloman's triumphant howl was picked up by ham radio operators across the continent as the United States became the world's second spacefaring nation.

This much is well-known; what has been largely lost to history, though, is the leading role played by a mild, stoop-shouldered physics professor from Worcester. Not because of neglect—Robert H. Goddard's place in the annals of spaceflight as the father of American rocketry has been assured—but because of enduring cold war suspicions. In the years since his death in 1945, facts about his private life, particularly during the Second World War, have remained hidden, mainly because of national security interests. Goddard was known to have had a vague "consultant" role in Project Blue Horizon, but little more has been discovered by Goddard's biographers. The official story is that Goddard spent the war teaching at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts: not much else is in the public record.

Yet if that part of Robert Goddard's biography is opaque, even less is known about the top-secret research group which was once code-named Team 390. Each year, on the anniversary of the *Lucky Linda's* flight, the seven survivors of the American rocket team gather at a sportsman's lodge in New Hampshire, on the shore of Lake Monomonock. Once again, in the lodge's den, the secret tale is told. As the seven old men speak, more than a few times their eyes wander to the framed photo of Goddard which hangs above the mantle.

They are all that remains of Team 390, but they rarely call themselves by that name. Now, as then, they are known among themselves simply as Goddard's people.

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The affair began on the morning of January 19, 1942, when OSS agent William Casey (later to become the Director of Central Intelligence during the Reagan Administration) arrived in Washington D.C. from London on a U.S. Army DC-3. An attaché case handcuffed to his wrist contained a top-secret Nazi document which British MI-6 agents had discovered on the island of Peenemünde. By noon, the document—code-named Black Umbrella, unofficially known as the "Sanger Report"—was on the desk of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The United States had been directly involved in World War II for only six weeks when the Sanger report was unearthed. Isolationism had crumbled after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and fear was running high in the country that North America itself was the next target of the Axis powers; in Washington itself, anti-aircraft guns and air-raid sirens were already being erected on city rooftops. Black Umbrella could not have arrived at a better time to have been taken seriously.

Peenemünde is on an island off the coast of Germany in the Baltic Sea. Once the site of a seldom-visited fishing village, during the war the island had become the location of secret Nazi rocket research for the German Army. Germans had been vigorously developing liquid-fuel rockets even before Adolf Hitler had become Chancellor, and the Nazis had incorporated rocket research into their war plans, recruiting a team of civilian rocket scientists, with Wernher von Braun as its chief scientist. British Intelligence had known that Peenemünde was the site of secret rocket experiments; a large missile called the A-4 was alleged to be in the final phases of R&D. "Silver and Gold," two MI-6 agents working undercover on Peenemunde as janitors, had been monitoring the continuing development of the A-4 rocket, later to be known by the Allies as the V-2.

However, in recent months more puzzling things had been happening in Peenemünde. Something new was being developed in a warehouse which was kept locked and guarded at all times; rumors around the base had it that an even more ambitious weapon than the A-4 was being built by von Braun's rocket team. High Command officers such as Hermann Göring, Rudolf Hess, and Heinrich Himmler had been regularly visiting Peenemünde, spending long hours in the warehouse. Yet Silver and Gold had no idea of what was going on, except that it was even more top-secret than the A-4 project; the warehouse was locked and under guard at all times.

Finally, the two agents had a stroke of luck. In a few precious, unguarded moments, a four hundred-page document, stamped "State Secret," had been carelessly left out on von Braun's desk by his personal secretary. Without reading the report, Silver had used a miniature camera to photograph as many pages as possible. The team then managed

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to smuggle the microfilm out of Germany, not knowing what information it contained except that it was part of a report that should have been kept under lock and key. The microfilm made its way to Whitehall in London, where MI-6 intelligence analysts had translated the contents. Horrified by what was found in the report, they rushed the transcript to Washington.

Black Umbrella was a detailed proposal by Dr. Eugen Sanger, an Austrian rocket scientist employed at the Hermann Göring Institute, the Luftwaffe's research center. Sanger had proposed the construction of a one-man, winged rocket-plane, an "antipodal bomber" capable not only of orbital flight but also of flying around the world to attack the United States. The rocket-plane—nicknamed the *Amerika Bomber* by Sanger—was to be almost a hundred feet long, weigh a hundred tons, and be propelled by a liquid-fuel rocket engine. Carrying an eighty-ton bomb load, it was to be launched on a rocket-propelled sled which would race down a two-mile track to a sharp incline. The rocket-plane would disengage from the sled at the end of the track and, now accelerating 1,640 feet per second, would climb under its own power to suborbital altitude.

Using the Earth's rotation for a "slingshot" effect, the *Amerika Bomber* would make a series of dives and climbs along the top of the atmosphere, skipping like a rock on the surface of a pond as it orbited the earth. The skips would not only help preserve fuel, but also keep the rocket-plane far above the range of conventional aircraft. In this way, the bomber could fly over Europe, Asia, and the Pacific Ocean to the United States. Two of its atmospheric skips could carry it across the continent and, after diving to an altitude of forty miles above the East Coast, the ship could drop an eighty-ton bomb on New York City. The *Amerika Bomber* then could fly across the Atlantic back to Germany, landing like a airplane on a conventional airstrip.

It would obviously be a tremendous effort by the Nazis to develop and successfully launch the Sanger bomber; New York was not a military target, either. But the sheer terror of the scheme—the vision of a Nazi rocket-plane diving from space to drop an eighty-ton incendiary bomb on Times Square—would be worth its value in propaganda alone. And if a squadron of antipodal bombers were built, as Sanger suggested, Germany would be in control of the highest of high grounds: outer space.

There was little doubt in the White House that the Nazis could pull off Black Umbrella. According to British intelligence, German civilians had been actively engaged in sophisticated rocket research since the 1920s under the aegis of the *Verin fur Raumschiffarht.* Almost immediately after Adolf Hitler became Chancellor, the Gestapo had seized all journals and records of the German Rocket Society, and the German Army had scooped up almost all members of the VfR, including Hermann

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Oberth, von Braun's mentor. It was known too that the German Army was diverting enormous amounts of men and material to Peenemünde, although it was also suspected that the Nazis had another, more secret missile base located somewhere else deep within the German borders.

According to declassified White House minutes of the meeting, President Roosevelt turned to OSS director William "Wild Bill" Donovon after hearing the report on the Sanger project. "So, Bill, who's in charge of *our* rocket program?" he asked.

"We don't have a rocket program, Mr. President," Donovon replied.

"All right," Roosevelt said calmly. "Then who is the leading rocket expert in America?"

"I don't know if there is one," Donovan said.

"Yes, there is," answered the President. "Somewhere out there, there's got to be someone who knows as much about these things as von Braun. Find him. He's now the most important man in the country."

The man they found was Robert H. Goddard, and he didn't feel like the most important man in the country. He was only a brilliant scientist who had long since become fed up with being called a crackpot.

Goddard had been obsessed with rockets since reading H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* as a youngster. Born in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1882, Goddard had pursued his obsession throughout his life; he earned his bachelor's degree in engineering from Worcester Polytechnic Institute and shortly thereafter became a professor of physics at Clark University. Goddard's secret dream was to build a rocket capable of landing men on Mars. It was a wild idea which would drive the scientist throughout his life, and also earn him as much trouble as encountered by predecessors like Galileo Galilei and Percival Lowell.

In January 1920, the Smithsonian Institute, one of Goddard's sources of funding for his early rocket research, published a sixty-nine-page monograph written by Goddard. The monograph, titled "A Method of Reaching Extreme Altitudes," mainly described how liquid-fuel rockets (themselves still only a theoretical possibility) could replace sounding balloons for exploring the upper atmosphere. The paper was mostly comprised of equations and tables, and thus would have escaped the notice of the general public had it not been for brief speculation at its end of how such rockets, perhaps someday in the future, could be used to reach the Moon. Goddard wrote that a rocket could crash-land on Earth's satellite and explode a load of magnesium powder which would be visible to astronomers on Earth.

Compared to Goddard's real objectives of manned space exploration, this was a rather modest proposal, but the press didn't see it that way. Newspapers reported Goddard's speculation with little accuracy and less

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respect. He was either scoffed at from such pinnacles as the New York *Times* (which claimed that rocket propulsion was impossible in outer space because there was no air for rockets to push against) or treated as a wild-eyed fantasist by papers like the local Worcester *Telegram* (whose headlines speculated that passenger rockets carrying tourists into space would be possible within a decade). Few newspapers took Goddard seriously; for the most part, he was regarded as a crazy college egghead.

Goddard, a shy and softspoken person, was appalled by the press attention and embarrassed by the ridicule. He henceforth took his research underground, particularly his experiments with rocket design and his efforts to launch a liquid-fuel rocket. Although he continued to devise means of sending rockets into space—including his own design for a rocket-plane—he carefully hid his notebooks in his laboratory file cabinet, in a folder ironically marked "Gunpowder Experiments." There were no reporters present in the hilltop farm field in nearby Auburn, Massachusetts, on the cold morning of March 16, 1926, when Goddard successfully fired the world's first liquid-fuel rocket.

By 1942, though, Robert Goddard was no longer in Worcester. Following the explosion of one of his rockets, the Auburn town council outlawed all types of "fireworks" within city limits. Following a brief series of experiments at the U.S. Army's Camp Devens in nearby Ashby, Goddard went on sabbatical from Clark University in 1931 and moved his residence and rockets to Roswell, New Mexico. There were a couple of contributing reasons for the move besides the unacceptability of rocketry in Massachusetts. The professor had battled tuberculosis throughout his life, which the damp New England climate scarcely helped, and the arid Southwestern desert also was a better site for rocket tests. In this sense, rural New Mexico was a fair trade for urban Massachusetts. He broke the sound barrier with a rocket in 1936, and by 1942 Goddard rockets were reaching record altitudes and achieving greater sophistication. Although largely unpublicized, his rocket experiments were on a par with the A-series rockets being developed in Nazi Germany. Few people knew about the feats which Goddard rockets were performing over the New Mexico high desert.

Yet Goddard's fortunes had also suffered, largely because of the bad press he had already endured. Although he continued to receive grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and from one of his admirers, Charles A. Lindbergh, the Smithsonian Institution had stopped funding his research. And though he had already developed solid-fuel ordinance such as the bazooka for the U.S. Army, the war department had expressed no interest in his liquid-fuel rocket research. Obscurity had become a double-edged sword for Goddard: he had found the solitude he craved, yet he was struggling to finance his experiments.

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All that changed on the morning of January 29, 1942, when two civilians from the OSS and an officer from the U.S. Army General Staff, Col. Omar Bliss, found Robert Goddard in the assembly shed at Goddard's ranch with an assistant, working on another high-altitude rocket. The rocket scientist greeted his unexpected visitors with courteous surprise; he dismissed his assistant and sat down on a bench outside the shed to hear what they had to say.

Bliss, now living in retirement on Sanibel Island, Florida, remembers the meeting he had with Goddard. "He was completely shocked, horrified," Bliss says. "He told us that he had kept up with German research during the '30s and knew that they were making progress with their rockets, but he had no idea that their work had come this far. We asked if Sanger's plan was possible and he thought about it a minute, then told us that if they had the resources and a little luck, yes, they could make it work. He knew that von Braun and Oberth were working for the Nazis, and he had no doubts that they and others had the knowledge to develop the *Amerika Bomber*."

The men from Washington asked Goddard if he had any ideas how to prevent New York from being blitzed from space; Goddard indicated that he had a few notions. "Then we asked him if he would help us," Bliss recalls. "I was afraid that he would refuse. People had treated him so unfairly before, after all. But he at once nodded his head, yes, he would do whatever was necessary to stop the Nazis."

The space race had begun.

Robert Goddard's role in what would become known as Project Blue Horizon, however, was not played in New Mexico. For various reasons, the war department returned the professor to his home town. Although the *Lucky Linda* would be launched from the White Sands Test Range less than a hundred miles from Goddard's ranch, Washington decided that the best place for Blue Horizon's brain trust was in Massachusetts.

The Department of War wanted to keep Goddard within arm's reach, and Massachusetts is closer to Washington, D.C., than New Mexico. Yet it was also decided not to take unnecessary risks. Goddard was reputed to personally tinker with his rockets while they were on the launch pad. This fact was known by Dr. Vannevar Bush, President Roosevelt's science advisor, who gave orders for "the Professor" to be kept away from the rockets themselves. In hindsight, this was good logic. There were many spectacular explosions in White Sands over the next two years of the crash program, one of which claimed the lives of two technicians. It would have been disastrous if Goddard himself had been killed during one of these accidents.

There was some resistance by the war department to having Project

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Blue Horizon located in Worcester, however. Another top-secret military R&D program was already underway in Massachusetts: the radar-defense project being developed in Cambridge at MIT's so-called "radiation laboratory." It was felt by many in the Pentagon that having two secret projects working so near to each other would be risky. Goddard was not eager to return to Worcester, either. It had become difficult for him to endure the New England climate, and he especially chafed at not being able to witness each rocket test. Bush argued, however, that neither Clark University nor MIT were high-profile enough (at the time) to attract Nazi spies; having Blue Horizon camouflaged by a college campus, like MIT's "Rad Lab," made perfect sense.

The White House won out over the Pentagon, and Goddard went along with his relocation orders. Esther Goddard, always protective of her husband's health, naturally returned to Worcester with Robert. They moved back into their former residence, where Goddard had been born, and readjusted to life in New England's second-largest city.

To build the security cover for Blue Horizon, the FBI coerced Clark University's directors into reinstating Goddard's status as an active faculty member. It was arranged that Goddard's only real academic workload was to teach a freshman class in introductory physics. In the university's academic calendar for the semesters in 1942 through 1943, though, there was a listing for an advanced-level class, "Physics 390," whose instructor was "to be announced." But even senior physics students at Clark found it impossible to enroll in the class; it was always filled at registration time.

Goddard's "graduate students" in Physics 390 were a group of nine young men enlisted from the American Rocket Society, unrepentent rocket buffs and far-sighted engineers with whom Goddard had corresponded over the years. Goddard had quickly hand-picked his group from memory; the war department and the FBI had contacted each person individually, requesting their volunteer help. None refused, though the Selective Service Administration had to issue draft deferrals for four members. The FBI moved them all to Worcester and managed to get them quietly isolated in a three-decker on Birch Street near the campus.

Team 390 (as they were code-named by the FBI) were strangers even among themselves. Almost all were from different parts of the country. Only two members, Lloyd Kapman and Harry Bell, both from St. Louis, had met before, and although Taylor Brickell and Henry Morse were known to each other from the letters page of *Astounding Science Fiction,* of which they were both devoted readers, they had never met face to face. The youngest, Roy Cahill, had just passed his eighteenth birthday; the

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oldest, Hamilton "Ham" Ballou, was in his mid-thirties, and was forced to shave off his mustache so that he'd appear to be younger.

And there were other problems. J. Jackson Jackson was the only black member of the team, which tended to make him stand out on the mostly white Clark University campus (his odd name earned him the nickname "Jack Cube"). Michael Ferris had briefly been a member of the American Communist Party during his undergraduate days, which meant that he had undergone intensive scrutiny by the FBI and had nearly been refused on the grounds of his past political activity before he'd agreed to sign a binding pledge of loyalty to the United States. And Gerard "Gerry" Mander had to be sprung from a county workhouse in Roanoke, Virginia: a rocket he had been developing had misfired, spun-out across two miles of tobacco field and crashed into a Baptist preacher's home.

Once they were together, though, Blue Horizon's R&D task force immediately hit it off. "We spoke the same language," recalls Gerry Mander, who now lives in Boston and who was then the team's "wildcat" engineer. "Rockets were our specialty, and putting something above the atmosphere was a dream we all shared. I mean, I was a young snot from backwoods Virginia, so sharing a room with a colored man like Jack Cube, at least at the time, seemed more unlikely than putting a guy in orbit. But Jack talked engineering, so we had that much in common, and in a couple of days I didn't even care."

"We were all a bunch of rocket-buffs," says Mike Ferris, the team's chemistry expert, "and the War Department had given us *carte blanche* to put a man in space." He laughs. "Man, we were like little kids thrown the key to the toy store!"

Team 390 had little doubt about what was needed. The only device capable of intercepting the Sanger bomber was another spacecraft, and the only reliable navigation system was a human pilot. Since the '20s, Robert Goddard had written—in his "gunpowder experiments" notebooks—rough designs for a rocket-plane, along with notes for gyroscopic guidance systems and other plans which turned out to be useful for the team. Studies at the California Institute of Technology had also suggested that a single-stage rocket-plane could be sent into space on a suborbital trajectory, with the ship gliding back through the atmosphere like a sailplane.

The team postulated that a spaceplane, launched by a liquid-fuel engine and ascending at a forty-five degree angle, could function as one-man space fighter capable of intercepting the *Amerika Bomber*. Upon studying the Sanger report, Team 390 further realized that the bomber would be most vulnerable during the ascent phases of its flight. At these points, the ship was slowest and least maneuverable, a sitting duck for another spacecraft's ordinance. So if the U.S. ship was launched from

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New Mexico just as the German ship was flying over the Pacific coast, it could intercept the *Amerika Bomber* before it reached New York City and shoot it down with ordinary solid-fuel rockets.

"We came up with it in one night over beer and pretzels in Bancroft Hotel bar," says Henry Morse, the team's electrical engineer who now lives in Winchester, New Hampshire. "Bob wasn't with us that night, but we had gone through his notebooks and read all that stuff he had thought up, so it was mainly a matter of putting it together. We knew we didn't need a very sophisticated ship, nothing like the space shuttle of today. Of course, we didn't have time to make anything like a space shuttle. Just something quick and dirty."

"Quick and dirty" soon became buzzwords for Goddard's people. The team took the plan to Goddard the following morning, during their "class" in Goddard's lab at the university. By the end of the day, following many hours of arguing, scribbling notes on the chalkboard, and flooding the trashcan with wadded-up notes, Team 390 and Goddard settled on the plan. The professor was amused that his "grad students" had come up with the scheme in a barroom. "If Mrs. Goddard will let me out of the house, I'd like to be in on the next session," he told Morse.

The FBI, though, was not amused when they discovered that Team 390 had been discussing rockets in a downtown Worcester bar. There was always the chance of Nazi spies. The FBI was especially sensitive, given the proximity to the MIT Rad Lab only forty miles away. Team 390 was ordered to stay out of the Bancroft, and J. Edgar Hoover assigned special escorts for Goddard and his team. The team thought the FBI was over-reacting.

"It was a pain, of course," Roy Cahill recalls. "We couldn't visit the men's room without having a G-man escort us. They were also parked all night outside Bob's house and our place on Birch Street. Esther couldn't stand it at first, but she changed her mind after the City Hall thing."

By early 1943, the V-2 missiles were perfected and the first rockets launched against targets in Great Britain. The Allies had been flying air raids upon V-2 launch sites in occupied northern France, and finally against Peenemünde itself. During one of the early reconnaissance missions over France, Ham Ballou—temporarily brought over to England for the purpose of gathering much-needed intelligence on the V-2 rockets—flew over the Normandy coastline in the back seat of a P-38J Lightning, snapping pictures as the pilot dodged anti-aircraft flack. Ballou returned to Worcester with little information that was immediately useful to Team 390, but for a while he was able to claim that he was the

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only person among Goddard's people who had come under enemy fire—until Goddard himself almost caught a bullet.

Following a devastating Allied air raid on Peenemünde, the German High Command transferred the principal R&D of the *Amerika Bomber* 250 miles inland to Nordhausen, where the base of a mountain had been hollowed out into vast caverns by prisoners from the nearby Dora concentration camp. This was the secret Nazi rocket facility which MI-6 had been unable to locate. Many of the same European Jews who built the Nordhausen site were later sacrificed in grotesque experiments—over the objections of von Braun and Oberth—that tested human endurance to high-altitude conditions.

Little of this mattered to SS Commandant Heinrich Himmler. Now that the Luftwaffe had now taken over the A-9 project from the German Army, he was more concerned with the fact, surmised through briefings with von Braun, that the German rocket team's work had been largely inspired by Goddard's research; he suspected that the United States might be embarked on a secret rocket program of its own. Although Gestapo agents in America had not found any evidence of a U.S. space initiative, Himmler decided not to take chances. In March 1943, he ordered the assassination of the only known American rocketry expert: Robert Hutchings Goddard.

For all of his brilliance, Goddard was also absent-minded about the mundane tasks of life; he could forget to fold his umbrella when he walked in from the rain. On March 30, 1943, the Worcester City Clerk's office sent the professor a letter informing him that he had not paid his city taxes. Goddard received the letter while working in his lab. Both irritated and alarmed, he put on his coat and immediately bustled out to catch the Main South trolley downtown. He left so quickly that his FBI escort, who was relieving himself in the men's room, missed the professor's departure.

But the Nazi Gestapo agent who had been watching Goddard for a week, waiting for such a break, didn't miss the opportunity. Following Goddard from his post on the Clark campus, the assassin also took the downtown trolley, getting off at the same stop in front of City Hall. As Goddard marched into the building, the Nazi slipped his silenced Luger Parabellum from his trenchcoat pocket and followed the scientist inside.

At the same moment, Worcester police officer Clay Reilly was walking downstairs from the second floor of City Hall when he spotted a trenchcoated man, carrying a gun, closing in on another man, who was walking toward the tax assessor's office. The second man was unaware that he was being pursued, but Reilly immediately sized up the situation.

"I didn't think twice," Reilly, now retired from the force, says in ret-

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rospect. "I pulled my pistol and shouted for the guy to freeze. He decided to mess with me instead."

Reilly was a crack shot on the WPD firing range; his skill didn't fail him then. The Gestapo agent turned and aimed at Reilly, and the officer nailed the assassin with one shot to the heart before the Nazi could squeeze his trigger. Goddard himself fled from City Hall, whence he was spirited away by his FBI escort, who had just arrived in his car.

No identification was found on the body of the man Patrolman Reilly had shot. The Worcester *Telegram* reported the story the next day under the front-page headline, "Mystery Killer Shot In City Hall." No one knew that he had been trying to kill Goddard; Reilly didn't recognize the scientist and Goddard had not remained at the scene. Clay Reilly was promoted to sergeant's rank for his quick thinking, but it wasn't until long after the war that the policeman was informed of the identity of the man he had shot or the person whose life he had saved, or of the fact that J. Edgar Hoover himself had insisted upon his promotion.

"Everything changed for us after that," says Henry Morse. "I guess we were sort of looking at Blue Horizon like it was a kid's adventure. Y'know, the Rocket Boys go to the Moon. But Bob's close call sobered us up."

The incident also sobered up the White House. Upon the insistence of Vannevar Bush, the FBI hastily sought a new base of operations in New England for Team 390. Within a week of the attempted assassination, a new locale for Project Blue Horizon was found: the Monomonock Gun & Rod Club, which had been closed since the beginning of the war. The lodge was located in the tiny farm community of Rindge, due north of Worcester just across the New Hampshire state line, close enough to Worcester to allow the rocket team to quickly relocate there. Because the club was accessible only by a single, unmarked dirt road, it had the isolation which the FBI believed was necessary to keep Team 390 hidden from the world.

The FBI purchased the property, and in the dead of night on April 6, 1943, all the rocket team's files and models were loaded into a truck. As far as Clark University's collegiate community was concerned, Dr. Goddard had taken an abrupt leave of absence due to health reasons, and nobody on campus seemed to notice the sudden departure of the small, insular group of grad students from Physics 390.

The Monomonock Gun & Rod Club was set in seven acres of New Hampshire forest on the northwestern side of Lake Monomonock. The club consisted mainly of a two-story white-washed lodge which dated back to the turn of the century; it had a handsome front porch which overlooked the serene main channel of the lake, a couple of spartan rooms on the upper floor which contained a dozen old-style iron beds, and a

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single outhouse beyond the back door. Mail from relatives was still sent to Esther Goddard. None of the families of the rocket team were made aware of the fact that their sons and husbands were now in New Hampshire.

The former sportsman's club was a far cry from the comforts of Clark University; most of the rocket team were unused to roughing it in the woods. Mice had taken up occupancy in the kitchen next to the long dining room, and the only sources of heat were a fireplace in the den and a pot-bellied stove on the second floor. One of the first orders of business was to knock down the hornet nests in upper bedrooms and under the porch eaves. "The first week we were there, we almost went on strike," laughs Gerry Mander. "If we hadn't been in a race against time, we might have told Bush and Hoover and all the rest to stick it until they found us some decent accommodations. As it was, though, we knew we had little choice."

Yet there was another major problem in the relocation. In New Mexico, the engineering team at White Sands was building unmanned prototype rockets based on the plans sent by Goddard's team, firing the rockets as soon as they could be made. The major hurdle was in producing a reliable engine for the spaceplane, now dubbed the "X-1." It had to be capable of lifting 65,500 pounds to orbit, yet most of the prototypes exploded, sometimes on the launch pad. For each small success, there were dozens of setbacks. There had been several pad explosions already, and in the latest failure the two technicians had been killed when the liquid-hydrogen tank ruptured during pressurization.

"Part of the problem was that the team wasn't in New Mexico to oversee the final stages of each test," Morse says. "We were expected to build rockets without getting our hands dirty, and you simply can't compartmentalize a project like that. What it came down to, finally, was that we had to have a test-bed in New Hampshire, whether Van Bush liked it or not."

It took Robert Goddard several weeks of lobbying to convince Vannevar Bush that some of the hands-on research had to be done by his people. Once Bush finally caved in, though, the next task was to locate an appropriate location for the construction of the new prototype. A giant rocket engine is difficult to conceal; it simply could not be constructed on a workbench in a sportsman's club.

One of the prime military contractors in Massachusetts was the Wyman-Gordon Company of Worcester, which was making aircraft forgings for the Army in its Madison Street factory. Upon meeting with Wyman-Gordon's president in Washington, D.C., Vannevar Bush managed to finagle the company into renting out a vacant warehouse on the factory grounds. Final assembly of Team 390's new prototype engine—referred

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to as "Big Bertha"—would be made in Warehouse Seven, from parts made across the country and secretly shipped to Wyman-Gordon. "Big Bertha's" aluminum outer casing was cast at Wyman-Gordon as well, although only a few select people at Wyman-Gordon knew exactly what it was.

Secrecy was paramount. Only a handful of Wyman-Gordon workers were involved in the construction of Big Bertha; all had survived extensive background checks by the FBI, and what they were told was on a strict "need-to-know" basis. The FBI put counterspies to work in the factory to guard against Nazi infiltrators. Work on Big Bertha was done only after midnight, when the least number of people were at the plant. When necessary, the Team-390 members were brought down from New Hampshire to the plant to supervise the engine's construction, making at least three transfers to different vehicles en route, with the final vehicle usually being a phony Coca-Cola delivery van owned by the FBI.

It was a little more difficult to find a suitable site for test-firing Big Bertha; Wyman-Gordon's plant was located in the middle of a residential neighborhood. This time, though, the rocket team didn't leave it to the FBI; Henry Morse and Roy Cahill borrowed Esther Goddard's car and spent several days driving around southern New Hampshire trying to find a place for the test-firing. After only a few days, they located a dairy farm in nearby Jaffrey, New Hampshire.

Jaffrey had a freight-line which ran straight up from Worcester, and the farm was located only two miles from the siding. Its owner, Marion Hartnell, was a World War I veteran who had just lost his only son in the fighting in France. He had no love for the Nazis, and once he was approached by Goddard himself, he eagerly volunteered to let the team use his barn for the test-firing of Big Bertha. "We told Mr. Hartnell that there was a possibility that our rocket might blow up and take his barn with it," Cahill recalls. "The old duffer didn't bat an eyelash. 'So long as you can promise me you'll shoot that rocket of yours right up Hitler's wazoo,' that was his response. He even turned down our offer of rent."

On the night of November 24, 1943—Thanksgiving eve, exactly six months before the launch of the *Lucky Linda*—Big Bertha was loaded onto a flatcar at the Wyman-Gordon rail siding. A special freight train took it due north across the state line to Jaffrey, where after midnight on Thanksgiving Day the massive rocket engine was carefully off-loaded onto a flat-bed truck, which in turn drove it to the Hartnell farm. An Army Corps of Engineers team from Fort Devens in Ashby, Massachusetts spent the rest of the morning anchoring the prototype engine onto the concrete horizontal test-bed that had been built in the barn. Shortly before noon, Goddard and his scientists began making their preparations for the test while the townspeople of Jaffrey unknowingly enjoyed their

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Thanksgiving meals. Team-390 waited until exactly ten P.M., then Robert Goddard threw the ignition switch on the control board outside the barn.

"I think everybody was standing a hundred feet away from the barn door when we lit the candle," Mander recalls. "When it went, I almost wet my pants. I thought we were going to blow up the whole damn farm."

Big Bertha didn't explode, though; the engine produced sixty tons of thrust for the requisite ninety seconds. "When it was over," Morse says, "Bob turned to us, let out his breath, and said, 'Gentlemen, we've got a success. Now let's go have that Thanksgiving dinner.' I swear, the old man was ready to cry."

The next night, Big Bertha was taken back to the Jaffrey rail-head. Loaded on another flatcar, it began its long journey across America to New Mexico. The first big hurdle of Blue Horizon had been jumped. Yet, despite the place he had earned in history, farmer Hartnell never told anyone about the Thanksgiving rocket test that had been made on his farm. He died in 1957 still maintaining secrecy, leaving the new owners of his farm puzzled at the strange concrete cradle which rested inside his barn.

The final months of Project Blue Horizon were a race against time. MI-6 and the OSS knew that the Nazis were in the final stages of building the *Amerika Bomber,* but the location of work was still unknown and the Nazis' rate of progress was uncertain. "Silver and Gold" had long since been pulled out of Peenemünde, so the Allies were now blind as to what the Nazis were doing. Reconnaissance flights by the Allies over Germany had failed to locate the two-mile launch track that Sanger had specified in the Black Umbrella document. Unknown to MI-6, it had been built near Nordhausen by the Dora concentration camp prisoners and camouflaged with nets. The Luftwaffe's scientists were coming steadily closer to fulfilling their primary objective; within the secret caverns of Nordhausen, the sleek antipodal rocket-plane was gradually taking shape and form.

Nonetheless, there was talk within the White House and the Pentagon that the Black Umbrella report had been a red herring. There had already been one similar instance, earlier in the war, when the Nazis had been suspected of developing an atomic weapon. In response, the war department had begun a crash-program to develop its own atomic bomb. This program, based in rural Tennessee and code-named the Manhattan Project, had been unsuccessfully struggling to develop an atomic bomb when a Danish physicist, Niels Bohr, managed to escape to the West with the reliable news that the Nazis were nowhere close to attaining controlled nuclear fission, let alone perfecting an atomic bomb.

Although minimal atomic research was secretly continued at the

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Brookhaven National Laboratory on Long Island, the Manhattan Project had been scrapped, mainly to fund Project Blue Horizon. Now, however, some people within the Pentagon were saying that Sanger's antipodal bomber was another chimera and that vital American resources were being wasted. On their side in the White House was Vice President Harry S Truman, who had begun referring to the American rocket program as "Project Buck Rogers." Yet Vannevar Bush persisted; unlike the atomic bomb scare, there was no proof that the Nazis were *not* developing the *Amerika Bomber*. Roosevelt pragmatically followed his advice, and Project Blue Horizon was not canceled.

"Not knowing what the Germans were doing was the scary part," Roy Cahill recalls, "so all we could do was work like bastards. We stopped thinking about it in terms of the glory of putting the first American in space. Now we only wanted to get someone up there without killing him."

Through the early part of 1944, Team 390 rarely left its makeshift laboratory at the sportsman's club. The ten scientists were constantly in the lodge's dining room, pulling twenty-hour days in their efforts to design the rest of the X-1. The FBI bodyguards had taken to cooking their meals for them, and the long table in the middle of the room was buried beneath books, slide-rules, and teetering mounds of paper. Big Bertha had only been one component that had to be designed from scratch; life-support, avionics, telemetry and guidance systems, even the pilot's vacuum suit still had to be developed. As the long New Hampshire winter set in, the days became shorter and the nights colder; tempers became frayed. More than once, members of the team went outside to settle their disputes with their fists. The only instance of relaxation any of the team's survivors remember was the December morning after a nor'easter dropped seven inches of snow on them; they dropped work and had a spontaneous snowball fight on Lake Monomonock's frozen surface.

"Bob was the one who really suffered," Henry Morse remembers. "His health had never been good, and the overwork, plus the hard winter we had that year, started ganging up on him. Esther used to come up from Worcester to make sure that he didn't overexert himself, that he rested once a day, but he started ignoring her advice after awhile. None of us were sleeping or eating well. We were frightened to death that the very next day we would hear that the *Amerika Bomber* had firebombed New York. It was that much of a race."

Piece by piece, the X-1 was assembled in New Mexico from the specifications laid down by Team 390. Unlike Big Bertha, some vital components such as the inertial guidance system were installed virtually without testing. There was simply not enough time to run everything through the wringer. The White Sands engineers knew that they were working from sheer faith. If Goddard's people were crucially wrong in

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any one of the thousands of areas, the spacecraft they were building would become a deathtrap for its pilot.

"How in the hell did we get a man into space?" After many years, Morse shakes his head. "Because we were scared of what would happen if we failed."

In the end, it was a photo-finish. Both the *Amerika Bomber* and the X-1 were finished and brought to their respective launch pads in the same week. Goddard and his team left New Hampshire for White Sands on May 15 to oversee the final launch, whenever it occurred. It was now a matter of waiting for the Germans to launch the *Amerika Bomber*.

The denouement is well-recorded in the history books. The vigil at White Sands ended early on the morning on May 24, 1944, when high-altitude recon planes and ground-based radar spotted the *Amerika Bomber* over the Pacific Ocean. Within twenty minutes the X-1—christened the *Lucky Linda* by its pilot after his wife—was successfully launched. Skid Sloman piloted the X-1 through a harrowing ascent and intercepted the A-9 in space above the Gulf of Mexico—during its final ascent skip before the dive which would have taken it over New York. Sloman destroyed the *Amerika Bomber* with a solid-fuel missile launched from the X-1's port wing. He then successfully guided his ship through atmospheric re-entry to touchdown in Lakehurst, New Jersey.

With the landing of the *Lucky Linda,* Project Blue Horizon was no longer top secret. Once the X-1's mission was announced to the American public by Edward R. Murrow on CBS radio, it became one of the most celebrated events of World War II. The destruction of the *Amerika Bomber* was also one of the final nails in the Nazi coffin. So many resources had been poured into the project that the rest of the German war machine suffered. Sanger's squadron of antipodal bombers was never built, and within a year, Germany surrendered to the Allies. The *Lucky Linda* flew again in August 1945, modified to drop a massive incendiary bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. Japan surrendered a few days later, and World War II ended with the dawn of the Space Age.

Yet the story doesn't end there.

Because the technology which had produced the *Lucky Linda* was considered vital to national security, the OSS clamped the lid on the history of the spaceplane's development. The story that was fed to the press was that the ship had been entirely designed and built in New Mexico. The OSS felt that it was necessary to hide the role that Robert Goddard and Team 390 had played.

In the long run, the OSS was correct. When the Third Reich fell, the Russian White Army rolled into Germany and took Nordhausen, capturing many of the German rocket scientists. Josef Stalin was interested

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in the Amerika Bomber and sought the expertise which had produced the spaceplane. Unknown to either the Americans or the Germans, the Soviet Union's Gas Dynamics Laboratory had been secretly working on its own rockets under the leadership of Fridrikh Tsander and Sergei Korolov. The Soviet rocket program had stalled during Russia's long "patriotic war," however, and Stalin wanted to regain the lead in astronautics. But von Braun, Oberth, and other German rocket scientists escaped the Russians and surrendered to American forces; eventually they came to the United States under "Operation Paperclip" and became the core of the American space program.

The lead was short-lived; in March 1949, the U.S.S.R. put its own manned spacecraft into orbit. Shortly thereafter, Brookhaven physicists announced the sustenance of nuclear fission, demonstrated by the explosion of an atomic bomb in the Nevada desert. This was followed, in less than a year, by the detonation of a Soviet atomic bomb in Siberia. The new cold war between the two superpowers moved into the heavens; for the next twenty-five years, until the passage of the United Nations Space Treaty in 1974 which outlawed nukesats, no person on Earth could ever feel safe again.

Richard Feynman, the Nobel laureate, accurately assayed the situation in his memoirs, *Get Serious, Mr. Feynman:* "It was bad enough that the U.S. and U.S.S.R. shared the capability to launch satellites into orbit; now they both had atomic bombs to put in the satellites. In a more sane world, it would have been bombs without rockets, or rockets without bombs—but, God help us, not both at once!"

Because the United States was now competing with Russia for dominance in space, the American rocket team lived under oaths of secrecy for more than forty years, forbidden to publicly discuss what they had done in Worcester and Rindge. Robert Goddard himself died on August 10, 1945, the day after the firebombing of Hiroshima. Esther Goddard remained silent about her husband's involvement with Blue Horizon until her death in 1982.

Other members of Team 390 passed away over the years with their lips sealed, yet almost all remained involved in the American space program. J. Jackson Jackson became the presidential science advisor during Robert Kennedy's administration, and Hamilton Ballou was the chief administrator of NASA during the time of the first lunar landing. Ham and Jack Cube are both dead now, but each May 26, the seven remaining members of Team 390 make their way to Rindge. Sometimes they are accompanied by children or grandchildren; in the last forty-seven years, seldom has any of the former teammates missed their anniversary. The Monomonock Gun & Rod Club belongs to them now, a gift from their grateful country.

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They spend the day getting the club in shape for the summer—or, rather, telling the kids what to do, now that the youngest founding member is in his mid-sixties. The old men sit together in rocking chairs on the front porch, drinking beer, kidding each other that FBI agents are watching them from the woods. When the chores are done, they and their families have dinner together, sitting alongside each other on benches at the long oak table in the lodge's dining room where they once scrawled notes and bickered. This is always a festive occasion, punctuated by laughter and dirty jokes. Another tradition is seeing who can get the raunchiest, within certain unspoken limits. Their wives roll their eyes in disgust and the kids make faces, and none of the seven men give a rotten damn what they think.

After dinner, as the wives and young people tend to the clean-up, the old men retire to the lodge's main room; Henry and Roy and Mike, Lloyd and Harry, Gerry and Taylor settle into chairs around the fieldstone fireplace, cigars and drinks in hand, their feet warmed by the fire. After a while, they begin to talk. As the wives and children and grandchildren gradually filter into the room, while the sun sets beyond the lake and the crickets and bullfrogs strike up the nocturnal orchestra, seven friends once again tell their secret tale.

On occasion, they look at the framed photo of Robert Goddard which hangs above the mantle. At other times, though, their eyes wander to another, smaller picture which hangs beside it, a shot which is familiar to nearly every person in the civilized world: the spacesuited figure of Neil Armstrong, the first American to set foot on Mars during the joint U.S.–Soviet expedition in 1976, opening an urn and scattering Goddard's cremated ashes across the landing site at the Utopia Planitia.

(The author extends his appreciation to Dorothy Mosakowski, Michael Warshaw, and Joe Thompson for their assistance.) ●

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THE DARKNESS WE POSSESS

Part snake,
three-quarters wolf,
a lion's share
of savage superstition
and bloody ritual,

wanton and capricious,
it comes wilding
and rumbling
through your dreams
blind as a cave fish,

reeking from the stench
of some subterranean grotto
where the sea abandons
its decaying organic debris,
where slime white grubs

with a lineage older
than the fang or the snarl
have long since tunneled
the bedrock of your soul
to a wormhole maze

which defies both
light and exploration:
here lies the darkness
we all possess,
a nest of shadow rage

which knows no song
but the high cacophony
of a bedlamite solo
screeched until
the throat is raw.

—Bruce Boston

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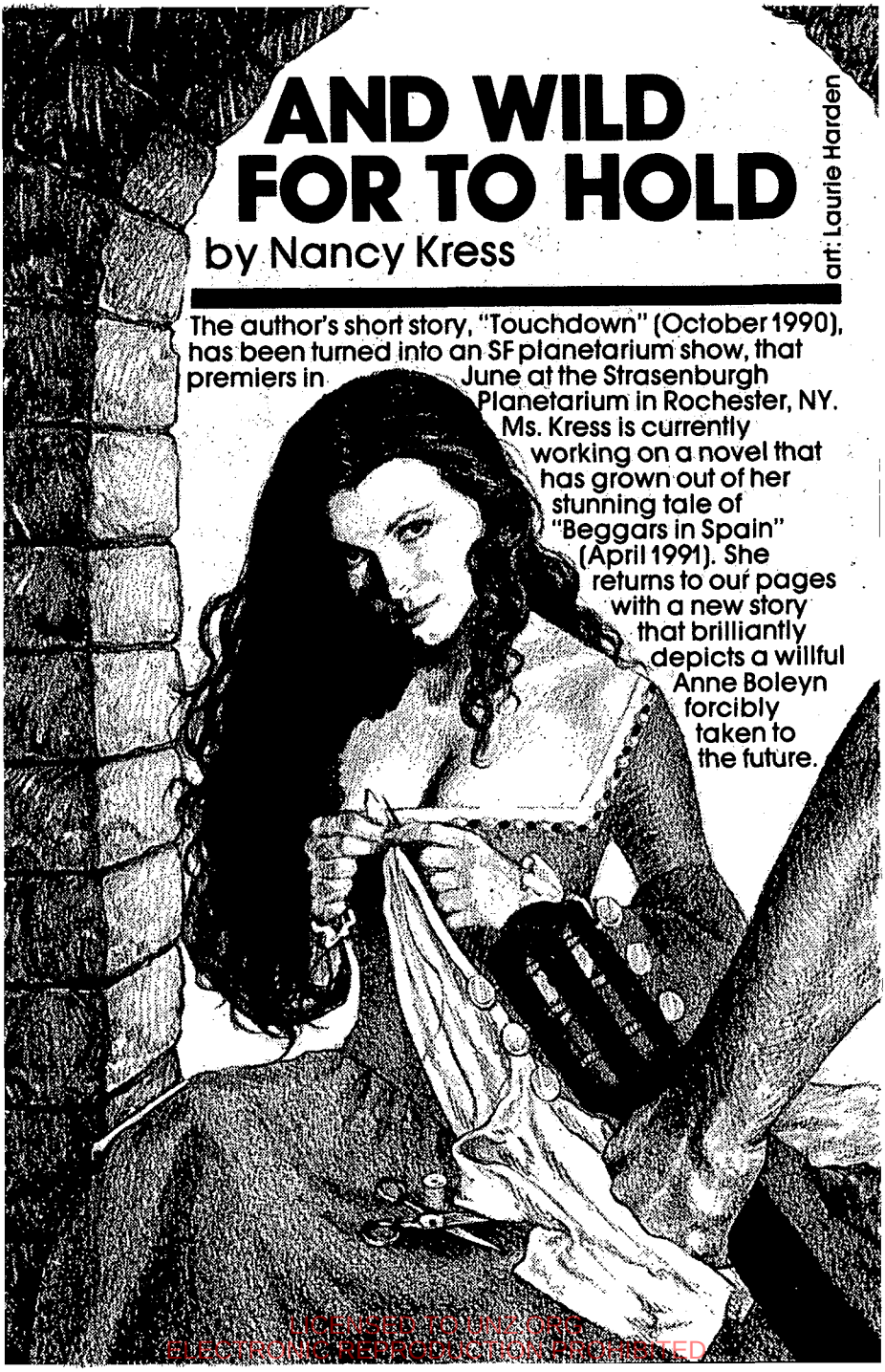
AND WILD FOR TO HOLD

by Nancy Kress

art: Laurie Harden

The author's short story, "Touchdown" (October 1990), has been turned into an SF planetarium show, that premiers in June at the Strasenburgh Planetarium in Rochester, NY. Ms. Kress is currently working on a novel that has grown out of her stunning tale of "Beggars in Spain" (April 1991). She returns to our pages with a new story that brilliantly depicts a willful Anne Boleyn forcibly taken to the future.



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The demon came to her first in the long gallery at Hever Castle. She had gone there to watch Henry ride away, magnificent on his huge charger, the horse's legs barely visible through the summer dust raised by the King's entourage. But Henry himself was visible. He rose in his stirrups to half-turn his gaze back to the manor house, searching its sun-glazed windows to see if she watched. The spurned lover, riding off, watching over his shoulder the effect he himself made. She knew just how his eyes would look, small blue eyes under the curling red-gold hair. Mournful. Shrewd. Undeterred.

Anne Boleyn was not moved. Let him ride. She had not wanted him at Hever in the first place.

As she turned from the gallery window a glint of light in the far corner caught her eye, and there for the first time was the demon.

It was made all of light, which did not surprise her. Was not Satan himself called Lucifer? The light was square, a perfectly square box such as no light had ever been before. Anne crossed herself and stepped forward. The box of light brightened, then winked out.

Anne stood perfectly still. She was not afraid; very little made her afraid. But nonetheless she crossed herself again and uttered a prayer. It would be unfortunate if a demon took residence at Hever. Demons could be dangerous.

Like kings.

Lambert half-turned from her console towards Culhane, working across the room. "Culhane—they said she was a witch."

"Yes? So?" Culhane said. "In the 1500s they said any powerful woman was a witch."

"No, it was more. They said it before she became powerful." Culhane didn't answer. After a moment Lambert said quietly, "The Rahvoli equations keep flagging her."

Culhane grew very still. Finally he said, "Let me see."

He crossed the bare small room to Lambert's console. She steadied the picture on the central Square. At the moment the console appeared in this location as a series of interlocking Squares mounting from floor to ceiling. Some of the Squares were solid real-time alloys; some were holosimulations; some were not there at all, neither in space nor time, although they appeared to be. The Project Focus Square, which *was* there, said:

TIME RESCUE PROJECT
UNITED FEDERATION OF UPPER SLIB, EARTH
FOCUS: ANNE BOLEYN
HEVER CASTLE, KENT, ENGLAND, EUROPE
1525:645:89:3
CHURCH OF THE HOLY HOSTAGE TEMPORARY PERMIT #4592

In the time-jump square was framed a young girl, dark hair just visible

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below her coif, her hand arrested at her long, slender neck in the act of signing the cross.

Lambert said, as if to herself, "She considered herself a good Catholic."

Culhane stared at the image. His head had been freshly shaved, in honor of his promotion to Project Head. He wore, Lambert thought, his new importance as if it were a fragile implant, liable to be rejected. She found that touching.

Lambert said, "The Rahvoli probability is .798. She's a definite key."

Culhane sucked in his cheeks. The dye on them had barely dried. He said, "So is the other. I think we should talk to Brill."

The serving women had finally left. The priests had left, the doctors, the courtiers, the nurses, taking with them the baby. Even Henry had left, gone . . . where? To play cards with Harry Norris? To his latest mistress? Never mind—they had all at last left her alone.

A girl.

Anne rolled over in her bed and pounded her fists on the pillow. A girl. Not a prince, not the son that England needed, that *she* needed . . . a girl. And Henry growing colder every day, she could feel it, he no longer desired her, no longer loved her. He would bed with her—oh, that, most certainly, if it would get him his boy, but her power was going. Was gone. That power she had hated, despised, but had used nonetheless because it was there and Henry should feel it, as he had made her feel his power over and over again . . . her power was going. She was Queen of England but her power was slipping away like the Thames at ebb tide, and she just as helpless to stop it as to stop the tide itself. The only thing that could have preserved her power was a son. And she had borne a girl. Strong, lusty, with Henry's own red curling hair . . . but a girl.

Anne rolled over on her back, painfully. Elizabeth was already a month old but everything in Anne hurt. She had contracted white-leg, so much less dreaded than childbed fever but still weakening, and for the whole month had not left her bed chamber. Servants and ladies and musicians came and went, while Anne lay feverish, trying to plan. . . . Henry had as yet made no move. He had even seemed to take the baby's sex well: "She seems a lusty wench. I pray God will send her a brother in the same good shape." But Anne knew. She always knew. She had known when Henry's eye first fell upon her. Had known to a shade the exact intensity of his longing during the nine years she had kept him waiting: nine years of celibacy, of denial. She had known the exact moment when that hard mind behind the small blue eyes had decided: *It is worth it. I will divorce Catherine and make her Queen.* Anne had known before he did when he decided it had all been a mistake. The price for making her queen had been too high. She was not worth it. Unless she gave him a son.

And if she did not . . .

In the darkness Anne squeezed her eyes shut. This was but an attack of childbed vapors, it signified nothing. She was never afraid, not she. This was only a night terror, and when she opened her eyes it would

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pass, because it must. She must go on fighting, must get herself heavy with son, must safeguard her crown. And her daughter. There was no one else to do it for her, and there was no way out.

When she opened her eyes a demon, shaped like a square of light, glowed in the corner of the curtained bedchamber.

Lambert dipped her head respectfully as the High Priest passed.

She was tall, and wore no external augments. Eyes, arms, ears, shaved head, legs under the gray-green ceremonial robe—all were her own, as required by the Charter of the Church of the Holy Hostage. Lambert had heard a rumor that before her election to High Priest she had had brilliant violet augmented eyes and gamma-strength arms, but on her election had had both removed and the originals restored. The free representative of all the Hostages in the solar system could not walk around enjoying high-maintenance augments. Hostages could, of course, but the person in charge of their spiritual and material welfare must appear human to any hostage she chose to visit. A four-handed Spacer held in a free-fall chamber on Mars must find the High Priest as human as did a genetically altered flyer of Ipsu being held hostage by the New Trien Republic. The only way to do that was to forego external augments.

Internals, of course, were a different thing.

Beside the High Priest walked the Director of the Time Research Institute, Toshio Brill. No ban on externals for *him:* Brill wore gold-plated sensors in his shaved black head, a display Lambert found slightly ostentatious. Also puzzling: Brill was not ordinarily a flamboyant man. Perhaps he was differentiating himself from Her Holiness. Behind Brill his Project Heads, including Culhane, stood silent, not speaking unless spoken to. Culhane looked nervous: He was ambitious, Lambert knew. She sometimes wondered why she was not.

"So far I am impressed," the High Priest said. "Impeccable Hostage conditions on the material side."

Brill murmured, "Of course, the spiritual is difficult. The three Hostages are so different from each other, and even for culture specialists and historians . . . the Hostages arrive here very upset."

"As would you or I," the High Priest said, not smiling, "in similar circumstances."

"Yes, Your Holiness."

"And now you wish to add a fourth Hostage, from a fourth time stream."

"Yes."

The High Priest looked slowly around at the main console; Lambert noticed that she looked right past the time-jump Square itself. Not trained in peripheral vision techniques. But she looked a long time at the stasis Square. They all did; outsiders were unduly fascinated by the idea that the whole building existed between time streams. Or maybe Her Holiness merely objected to the fact that the Time Research Institute, like some larger but hardly richer institutions, was exempt from the all-

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world taxation that supported the Church. Real estate outside time was also outside taxation.

The High Priest said, "I cannot give permission for such a political disruption without understanding fully every possible detail. Tell me again."

Lambert hid a grin. The High Priest did not need to hear it again. She knew the whole argument, had pored over it for days, most likely, with her advisors. And she would agree; why wouldn't she? It could only add to her power. Brill knew that. He was being asked to explain only to show that the High Priest could force him to do it, again and again, until she—not he—decided the explanation was sufficient and the Church of the Holy Hostage issued a permanent hostage permit to hold one Anne Boleyn, of England Time Delta, for the altruistic purpose of preventing a demonstrable, Class One war.

Brill showed no outward recognition that he was being humbled. "Your Holiness, this woman is a fulcrum. The Rahvoli equations, developed in the last century by—"

"I know the Rahvoli equations," the High Priest said. And smiled sweetly.

"Then Your Holiness knows that any person identified by the equations as a fulcrum is directly responsible for the course of history. Even if he or she seems powerless in local time. Mistress Boleyn was the second wife of Henry VIII of England. In order to marry her, he divorced his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, and in order to do that, he took all of England out of the Catholic Church. Protestantism was—"

"And what again was that?" Her Holiness said, and even Culhane glanced sideways at Lambert, appalled. The High Priest was playing. With a *Research Director*. Lambert hid her smile. Did Culhane know that high seriousness opened one to the charge of pomposity? Probably not.

"Protestantism was another branch of 'Christianity,' " the Director said patiently. So far, by refusing to be provoked, he was winning. "It was warlike, as was Catholicism. In 1642 various branches of Protestantism were contending for political power within England, as was a Catholic faction. King Charles was Catholic, in fact. Contention led to civil war. Thousands of people died fighting, starved to death, were hung as traitors, were tortured as betrayers . . . "

Lambert saw Her Holiness wince. She must hear this all the time, Lambert thought, what else was her Office for? Yet the wince looked genuine.

Brill pressed his point. "Children were reduced to eating rats to survive. In Cornwall, rebels' hands and feet were cut off, gibbets were erected in market squares and men hung on them alive and—"

"Enough," the High Priest said. "This is why the Church exists. To promote the Holy Hostages that prevent war."

"And that is what we wish to do," Brill said swiftly, "in other time streams, now that our own has been brought to peace. In Stream Delta,

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which has only reached the sixteenth century—Your Holiness knows that each stream progresses at a different relative rate—"

The High Priest made a gesture of impatience.

"—the woman Anne Boleyn is the fulcrum. If she can be taken hostage after the birth of her daughter Elizabeth, who will act throughout a very long reign to preserve peace, and before Henry declares the Act of Supremacy that opens the door to religious divisiveness in England, we can prevent great loss of life. The Rahvoli equations show a 79.8 percent probability that history will be changed in the direction of greater peace, right up through the following two centuries. Religious wars often—"

"There are other, bloodier religious wars to prevent than the English civil war."

"True, Your Holiness," the Director said humbly. At least it looked like humility to Lambert. "But ours is a young science. Identifying other time streams, focusing on one, identifying historical fulcra—it is such a new science. We do what we can, in the name of Peace."

Everyone in the room looked pious. Lambert kept her face blank. In the name of Peace—and of prestigious scientific research, attended by rich financial support and richer academic reputations.

"And it is Peace we seek," Brill pressed, "as much as the Church itself does. With a permanent permit to take Anne Boleyn Hostage, we can save countless lives in this other time stream, just as the Church preserves peace in our own."

The High Priest played with the sleeve of her robe. Lambert could not see her face. But when she looked up, she was smiling.

"I'll recommend to the All-World Forum that your hostage permit be granted, Director. I will return in two months to make an official check on the Holy Hostage."

Brill, Lambert saw, didn't quite stop himself in time from frowning. "Two months? But with the entire solar system of Hostages to supervise—"

"Two months, Director," Her Holiness said. "The week before the All-World Forum convenes to vote on revenue and taxation."

"I—"

"Now I would like to inspect the three Holy Hostages you already hold for the altruistic prevention of war."

Later, Culhane said to Lambert, "He did not explain it very well. It could have been made so much more urgent . . . it *is* urgent. Those bodies rotting in Cornwall . . . " He shuddered.

Lambert looked at him. "You care. You genuinely do."

He looked back at her, in astonishment. "And you don't? You must, to work on this project!"

"I care," Lambert said. "But not like that."

"Like what?"

She tried to clarify it for him, for herself. "The bodies rotting . . . I see them. But it's not our own history—"

"What does that matter? They're still human!"

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He was so earnest. Intensity burned on him like skin tinglers. Did Culhane even use skin tinglers, Lambert wondered? Fellow researchers spoke of him as an ascetic, giving all his energy, all his time, to the Project. A woman in his domicile had told Lambert he even lived chaste, doing a Voluntary Celibacy Mission for the entire length of his research grant. Lambert had never met anyone who actually did that. It was intriguing.

She said, "Are you thinking of the priesthood once the project is over, Culhane?"

He flushed. Color mounted from the dyed cheeks, light blue since he had been promoted to Project Head, to pink on the fine skin of his shaved temples.

"I'm thinking of it."

"And doing a Celibacy Mission now?"

"Yes. Why?" His tone was belligerent: a Celibacy Mission was slightly old-fashioned. Lambert studied his body: tall, well-made, strong. Augments? Muscular, maybe. He had beautiful muscles.

"No reason," she said, bending back to her console until she heard him walk away.

The demon advanced. Anne, lying feeble on her curtained bed, tried to call out. But her voice would not come, and who would hear her anyway? The bedclothes were thick, muffling sound; her ladies would all have retired for the night, alone or otherwise; the guards would be drinking the ale Henry had provided all of London to celebrate Elizabeth's christening. And Henry . . . he was not beside her. She had failed him of his son.

"Be gone," she said weakly to the demon. It moved closer.

They had called her a witch. Because of her little sixth finger, because of the dog named Urian, because she had kept Henry under her spell so long without bedding him. But if I were really a witch, she thought, I could send this demon away. More: I could hold Henry, could keep him from watching that whey-faced Jane Seymour, could keep him in my bed. . . . She was not a witch.

Therefore, it followed that there was nothing she could do about this demon. If it was come for her, it was come. If Satan Master of Lies was decided to have her, to punish her for taking the husband of another woman, and for . . . how much could demons know?

"This was all none of my wishing," she said aloud to the demon. "I wanted to marry someone else." The demon continued to advance.

Very well, then, let it take her. She would not scream. She never had—she prided herself on it. Not when they had told her she could not marry Harry Percy. Not when she had been sent home from the Court, peremptorily and without explanation. Not when she had discovered the explanation: Henry wished to have her out of London so he could bed his latest mistress away from Catherine's eyes. She had not screamed when a crowd of whores had burst into the palace where she was supping,

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demanding Nan Bullen, who they said was one of them. She had escaped across the Thames in a barge, and not a cry had escaped her lips. They had admired her for her courage: Wyatt, Norris, Weston, Henry himself. She would not scream now.

The box of light grew larger as it approached. She had just time to say to it, "I have been God's faithful and true servant, and my husband the King's," before it was upon her.

"The place where a war starts," Lambert said to the faces assembled below her in the Hall of Time, "is long before the first missile, or the first bullet, or the first spear."

She looked down at the faces. It was part of her responsibilities as an intern Researcher to teach a class of young, some of whom would become historians. The class was always taught in the Hall of Time. The expense was enormous: keeping the Hall in stasis for nearly an hour, bringing the students in through the force field, activating all the Squares at once. Her lecture would be replayed for them later, when they could pay attention to it: Lambert did not blame them for barely glancing at her now. Why should they? The walls of the circular room, which were only there in a virtual sense, were lined with Squares, which were not really there at all. The Squares showed actual, local-time scenes from wars that had been there, were there now, somewhere, in someone's reality.

Men died writhing in the mud, arrows through intestines and necks and groins, at Agincourt.

Women lay flung across the bloody bodies of their children at Cawnpore.

In the hot sun the flies crawled thick upon the split faces of the heroes of Marathon.

Figures staggered, their faces burned off, away from Hiroshima.

Breathing bodies, their perfect faces untouched and their brains turned to mush by spekaline, sat in orderly rows under the ripped dome on Io-One.

Only one face turned towards Lambert, jerked as if on a string, a boy with wide violet eyes brimming with anguish. Lambert obligingly started again.

"The place where a war starts is long before the first missile, or the first bullet, or the first spear. There are always many forces causing a war: economic, political, religious, cultural. Nonetheless, it is the great historical discovery of our time that if you trace each of these back—through the records, through the eye-witness accounts, through the entire burden of data only Rahvoli equations can handle—you come to a fulcrum. A single event or act or person. It is like a decision tree with a thousand thousand generations of decisions: Somewhere there was one first yes/no. The place where the war started, and where it could have been prevented.

"The great surprise of Time Rescue work has been how often that place was female.

"Men fought wars, when there were wars. Men controlled the gold and

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the weapons and the tariffs and sea rights and religions that have caused wars, and the men controlled the bodies of other men that did the actual fighting. But men are men. They acted at the fulcrum of history, but often what tipped their actions one way or another was what they loved. A woman. A child. She became the passive, powerless weight he chose to lift, and the balance tipped. She, not he, is the branching place, where the decision tree splits and the war begins."

The boy with the violet eyes was still watching her. Lambert stayed silent until he turned to watch the Squares—which was the reason he had been brought here. Then she watched him. Anguished, passionate, able to feel what war meant—he might be a good candidate for the Time Rescue team, when his preliminary studies were done. He reminded her a little of Culhane.

Who right now, as Project Head, was interviewing the new Hostage, not lecturing to children.

Lambert stifled her jealousy. It was unworthy. And short-sighted: She remembered what this glimpse of human misery had meant to her three years ago, when she was an historian candidate. She had had nightmares for weeks. She had thought the event was pivotal to her life, a dividing point past which she would never be the same person again. How could she? She had been shown the depths to which humanity, without the Church of the Holy Hostage and the All-World Concordance, could descend. Burning eye sockets, mutilated genitals, a general who stood on a hill and said, "How I love to see the arms and legs fly!" It had been shattering. She had been shattered, as the Orientation intended she should be.

The boy with the violet eyes was crying. Lambert wanted to step down from the platform and go to him. She wanted to put her arms around him and hold his head against her shoulder . . . but was that because of compassion, or was that because of his violet eyes?

She said silently to him, without leaving the podium, *You will be all right. Human beings are not as mutable as you think. When this is over, nothing permanent about you will have changed at all.*

Anne opened her eyes. Satan leaned over her.

His head was shaved, and he wore strange garb of an ugly blue-green. His cheeks were stained with dye. In one ear metal glittered and swung. Anne crossed herself.

"Hello," Satan said, and the voice was not human.

She struggled to sit up; if this be damnation, she would not lie prone for it. Her heart hammered in her throat. But the act of sitting brought the Prince of Darkness into focus, and her eyes widened. He looked like a man. Painted, made ugly, hung around with metal boxes that could be tools of evil—but a man.

"My name is Culhane."

A man. And she had faced men. Bishops, nobles, Chancellor Wolsey.

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She had outfaced Henry, Prince of England and France, Defender of the Faith.

"Don't be frightened, Mistress Boleyn. I will explain to you where you are and how you came to be here."

She saw now that the voice came not from his mouth, although his mouth moved, but from the box hung around his neck. How could that be? Was there then a demon in the box? But then she realized something else, something real to hold onto.

"Do not call me Mistress Boleyn. Address me as Your Grace. I am the queen."

The something that moved behind his eyes convinced her, finally, that he was a mortal man. She was used to reading men's eyes. But why should this one look at her like that—with pity? With admiration?

She struggled to stand, rising off the low pallet. It was carved of good English oak. The room was paneled in dark wood and hung with tapestries of embroidered wool. Small-paned windows shed brilliant light over carved chairs, table, chest. On the table rested a writing desk and a lute. Reassured, Anne pushed down the heavy cloth of her night shift and rose.

The man, seated on a low stool, rose too. He was taller than Henry—she had never seen a man taller than Henry—superbly muscled. A soldier? Fright fluttered again, and she put her hand to her throat. This man, watching her—watching her *throat*. Was he then an executioner? Was she under arrest, drugged and brought by some secret method into the Tower of London? Had someone brought evidence against her—or was Henry that disappointed that she had not borne a son that he was eager to supplant her already?

As steadily as she could, Anne walked to the window.

The Tower bridge did not lay beyond in the sunshine. Nor the river, nor the gabled roofs of Greenwich Palace. Instead there was a sort of yard, with huge beasts of metal growling softly. On the grass naked young men and women jumped up and down, waving their arms, running in place and smiling and sweating as if they did not know either that they were uncovered or crazed.

Anne took firm hold of the windowsill. It was slippery in her hands and she saw that it was not wood at all, but some material made to resemble wood. She closed her eyes, then opened them. She was a queen. She had fought hard to become a queen, defending a virtue nobody believed she still had, against a man who claimed that to destroy that virtue was love. She had won, making the crown the price of her virtue. She had conquered a king, brought down a Chancellor of England, outfaced a pope. She would not show fear to this executioner in this place of the damned, whatever it was.

She turned from the window, her head high. "Please begin your explanation, Master . . . "

"Culhane."

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"Master Culhane. We are eager to hear what you have to say. And we do not like waiting."

She swept aside her long night dress as if it were Court dress and seated herself in the not-wooden chair carved like a throne.

"I am a hostage," Anne repeated. "In a time that has not yet happened."

From beside the window, Lambert watched. She was fascinated. Anne Boleyn had, according to Culhane's report, listened in silence to the entire explanation of the Time Rescue, that explanation so carefully drafted and revised a dozen times to fit what the sixteenth century mind could understand of the twenty-second. Queen Anne had not become hysterical. She had not cried, nor fainted, nor professed disbelief. She had asked no questions. When Culhane had finished, she had requested, calmly and with staggering dignity, to see the ruler of this place, with his ministers. Toshio Brill, watching on monitor because the wisdom was that at first new Hostages would find it easier to deal with one consistent researcher, had hastily summoned Lambert and two others. They had all dressed in the floor-length robes used for grand academic ceremonies and never else. And they had marched solemnly into the ersatz sixteenth-century room, bowing their heads.

Only their heads. No curtsies. Anne Boleyn was going to learn that no one curtsied anymore.

Covertly Lambert studied her, their fourth Time Hostage, so different from the other three. She had not risen from her chair, but even seated she was astonishingly tiny. Thin, delicate bones, great dark eyes, masses of silky black hair loose on her white nightdress. She was not pretty by the standards of this century; she had not even been counted pretty by the standards of her own. But she was compelling. Lambert had to give her that.

"And I am prisoner here," Anne Boleyn said. Lambert turned up her translator; the words were just familiar, but the accent so strange she could not catch them without electronic help.

"Not prisoner," the Director said. "Hostage."

"Lord Brill, if I cannot leave, then I am a prisoner. Let us not mince words. I cannot leave this castle?"

"You cannot."

"Please address me as 'Your Grace.' Is there to be a ransom?"

"No, Your Grace. But because of your presence here thousands of men will live who would have otherwise died."

With a shock, Lambert saw Anne shrug; the deaths of thousands of men evidently did not interest her. It was true, then. They really were moral barbarians, even the women. The students should see this. That small shrug said more than all the battles viewed in Squares. Lambert felt her sympathy for the abducted woman lessen, a physical sensation like the emptying of a bladder, and was relieved to feel it. It meant she, Lambert, still had her own moral sense.

"How long must I stay here?"

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"For life, Your Grace," Brill said bluntly.

Anne made no reaction; her control was awing.

"And how long will that be, Lord Brill?"

"No person knows the length of his or her life, Your Grace."

"But if you can read the future, as you claim, you must know what the length of mine would have been."

Lambert thought: We must not underestimate her. This Hostage is not like the last one.

Brill said, with the same bluntness that honored Anne's comprehension—did she realize that?— "If we had not brought you here, you would have died May 19, 1536."

"How?"

"It does not matter. You are no longer part of that future, and so now events there will—"

"*How?*"

Brill didn't answer.

Anne Boleyn rose and walked to the window, absurdly small, Lambert thought, in the trailing nightdress. Over her shoulder she said, "Is this castle in England?"

"No," Brill said. Lambert saw him exchange glances with Culhane.

"In France?"

"It is not in any place on the Earth," Brill said, "although it can be entered from three places on Earth. It is outside of Time."

She could not possibly have understood, but she said nothing, only went on staring out the window. Over her shoulder Lambert saw the exercise court, empty now, and the anti-matter power generators. Two technicians crawled over them with a robot monitor. What did Anne Boleyn make of them?

"God knows if I had merited death," Anne said. Lambert saw Culhane start.

Brill stepped forward. "Your Grace—"

"Leave me now," she said, without turning.

They did. Of course she would be monitored constantly—everything from brain scans to the output of her bowels. Although she would never know this. But if suicide was in that life-defying mind, it would not be possible. If Her Holiness ever learned of the suicide of a Time Hostage . . . Lambert's last glimpse before the door closed was of Anne Boleyn's back, still by the window, straight as a spear as she gazed out at anti-matter power generators in a building in permanent stasis.

"Culhane, meeting in ten minutes," Brill said. Lambert guessed the time lapse was to let the Director change into working clothes. Toshio Brill had come away from the interview with Anne Boleyn somehow diminished. He even looked shorter, although shouldn't her small stature have instead augmented his?

Culhane stood still in the corridor outside Anne's locked room (would she try the door?). His face was turned away from Lambert's. She said,

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"Culhane . . . you jumped a moment in there. When she said God alone knew if she had merited death."

"It was what she said at her trial," Culhane said. "When the verdict was announced. Almost the exact words."

He still had not moved so much as a muscle of that magnificent body. Lambert said, probing, "You found her impressive, then. Despite her scrawniness, and beyond the undeniable pathos of her situation."

He looked at her then, his eyes blazing: Culhane, the research engine. "I found her magnificent."

She never smiled. That was one of the things she knew they remarked upon among themselves: She had overheard them in the walled garden. Anne Boleyn never smiles. Alone, they did not call her Queen Anne, or Her Grace, or even the Marquis of Rochford, the title Henry had conferred upon her, the only female peeress in her own right in all of England. No, they called her Anne Boleyn, as if the marriage to Henry had never happened, as if she had never borne Elizabeth. And they said she never smiled.

What cause was there to smile, in this place that was neither life nor death?

Anne stitched deftly at a piece of amber velvet. She was not badly treated. They had given her a servant, cloth to make dresses—she had always been clever with a needle, and the skill had not deserted her when she could afford to order any dresses she chose. They had given her books, the writing Latin but the pictures curiously flat, with no raised ink or painting. They let her go into any unlocked room in the castle, out to the gardens, into the yards. She was a Holy Hostage.

When the amber velvet gown was finished, she put it on. They let her have a mirror. A lute. Writing paper and quills. Whatever she asked for, as generous as Henry had been in the early days of his passion, when he had divided her from her love Harry Percy, and had kept her loving hostage to his own fancy.

Cages came in many sizes. Many shapes. And, if what Master Culhane and the Lady Mary Lambert said was true, in many times.

"I am not a lady," Lady Lambert had protested. She needn't have bothered. Of course she was not a lady—she was a commoner, like the others, and so perverted was this place that the woman sounded insulted to be called a lady. Lambert did not like her, Anne knew, although she had not yet found out why. The woman was unsexed, like all of them, working on her books and machines all day, exercising naked with men, who thus no more looked at their bodies than they would those of fellow soldiers in the roughest camp. So it pleased Anne to call Lambert a lady when she did not want to be one, as she was now so many things she had never wanted to be. "Anne Boleyn." Who never smiled.

"I will create you a lady," she said to Lambert. "I confer on you the rank of baroness. Who will gainsay me? I am the queen, and in this place there is no king."

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And Mary Lambert had stared at her with the unsexed bad manners of a common drab.

Anne knotted her thread and cut it with silver scissors. The gown was finished. She slipped it over her head and struggled with the buttons in the back, rather than call the stupid girl who was her servant. The girl could not even dress hair. Anne smoothed her hair herself, then looked critically at her reflection in the fine mirror they had brought her.

For a woman a month and a half from childbed, she looked strong. They had put medicines in her food, they said. Her complexion, that creamy dark skin that seldom varied in color, was well set off by the amber velvet. She had often worn amber, or tawny. Her hair, loose since she had no headdress and did not know how to make one, streamed over her shoulders. Her hands, long and slim despite the tiny extra finger, carried a rose brought to her by Master Culhane. She toyed with the rose, to show off the beautiful hands, and lifted her head high.

She was going to have an audience with Her Holiness, a female pope. And she had a request to make.

"She will ask, Your Holiness, to be told the future. Her future, the one Anne Boleyn experienced in our own time stream, after the point we took her Hostage from hers. And the future of England." Brill's face had darkened; Lambert could see that he hated this. To forewarn his political rival that a Hostage would complain about her treatment. A *Hostage,* that person turned sacred object through the sacrifice of personal freedom to global peace. When Tullio Amaden Koyushi had been Hostage from Mars Three to the Republic of China, he had told the Church official in charge of his case that he was not being allowed sufficient exercise. The resulting inter-system furor had lost the Republic of China two trade contracts, both important. There was no other way to maintain the necessary reverence for the Hostage political system. The Church of the Holy Hostage was powerful because it must be, if the solar system was to stay at peace. Brill knew that.

So did Her Holiness.

She wore full state robes today, gorgeous with hundreds of tiny mirrors sent to her by the grateful across all worlds. Her head was newly shaved. Perfect, synthetic jewels glittered in her ears. Listening to Brill's apology-in-advance, Her Holiness smiled. Lambert saw the smile, and even across the room she felt Brill's polite, concealed frustration.

"Then if this is so," Her Holiness said, "why cannot Lady Anne Boleyn be told her future? Hers and England's?"

Lambert knew that the High Priest already knew the answer. She wanted to make Brill say it.

Brill said, "It is not thought wise, Your Holiness. If you remember, we did that once before."

"Ah, yes, your last Hostage. I will see her, too, of course, on this visit. Has Queen Helen's condition improved?"

"No," Brill said shortly.

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"And no therapeutic brain drugs or electronic treatments have helped? She still is insane from the shock of finding herself with us?"

"Nothing has helped."

"You understand how reluctant I was to let you proceed with another Time Rescue at all," Her Holiness said, and even Lambert stifled a gasp. The High Priest did not make those determinations; only the All-World Forum could authorize or disallow a Hostage taking—across space *or* time. The Church of the Holy Hostage was responsible only for the inspection and continuation of permits granted by the Forum. For the High Priest to claim political power she did not possess—

The Director's eyes gleamed angrily. But before he could reply, the door opened and Culhane escorted in Anne Boleyn.

Lambert pressed her lips together tightly. The woman had sewn herself a gown, a sweeping ridiculous confection of amber velvet so tight at the breasts and waist she must hardly be able to breathe. How had women conducted their lives in such trappings? The dress narrowed her waist to nearly nothing; above the square neckline her collar bones were delicate as a bird's. Culhane hovered beside her, huge and protective. Anne walked straight to the High Priest, knelt, and raised her face.

She was looking for a ring to kiss.

Lambert didn't bother to hide her smile. A High Priest wore no jewelry except earrings, ever. The pompous little Hostage had made a social error, no doubt significant in her own time.

Anne smiled up at Her Holiness, the first time anyone had seen her smile at all. It changed her face, lighting it with mischief, lending luster to the great dark eyes. A phrase came to Lambert, penned by the poet Thomas Wyatt to describe his cousin Anne: *And wild for to hold, though I seem tame.*

Anne said, in that sprightly yet aloof manner that Lambert was coming to associate with her, "It seems, Your Holiness, that we have reached for what is not there. But the lack is ours, not yours, and we hope it will not be repeated in the request we come to make of you."

Direct. Graceful, even through the translator and despite the ludicrous imperial plural. Lambert glanced at Culhane, who was gazing down at Anne as at a rare and fragile flower. How could he? That skinny body, without muscle tone let alone augments, that plain face, the mole on her neck. . . . This was not the sixteenth century. Culhane was a fool.

As Thomas Wyatt had been. And Sir Harry Percy. And Henry, King of England. All caught not by beauty but by that strange elusive charm.

Her Holiness laughed. "Stand up, Your Grace. We don't kneel to officials here." *Your Grace.* The High Priest always addressed Hostages by the honorifics of their own state, but in this case it could only impede Anne's adjustment.

And what do I care about her adjustment? Lambert jeered at herself. Nothing. What I care about is Culhane's infatuation, and only because he rejected me first. Rejection, it seemed, was a great whetter of appetite—in any century.

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Anne rose. Her Holiness said, "I'm going to ask you some questions, Your Grace. You are free to answer any way you wish. My function is to ensure that you are well treated, and that the noble science of the prevention of war, which has made you a Holy Hostage, is also well served. Do you understand?"

"We do."

"Have you received everything you need for your material comfort?"

"Yes," Anne said.

"Have you received everything you've requested for your mental comfort? Books, objects of any description, company?"

"No," Anne said. Lambert saw Brill stiffen.

Her Holiness said, "No?"

"It is necessary for the comfort of our mind—and for our material comfort as well—to understand our situation as fully as possible. Any rational creature requires such understanding to reach ease of mind."

Brill said, "You have been told everything related to your situation. What you ask is to know about situations that now, because you are here, will never happen."

"Situations that *have* happened, Lord Brill, else no one could know of them. You could not."

"In *your* time stream they will not happen," Brill said. Lambert could hear the suppressed anger in his voice, and wondered if the High Priest could. Anne Boleyn couldn't know how serious it was to be charged by Her Holiness with a breach of Hostage treatment. If Brill was ambitious—and why wouldn't he be?—such charges could hurt his future.

Anne said swiftly, "Our time is now your time. *You* have made it so. The situation was none of our choosing. And if your time is now ours, then surely we are entitled to the knowledge that accompanies our time." She looked at the High Priest. "For the comfort of our mind."

Brill said, "Your Holiness—"

"No, Queen Anne is correct. Her argument is valid. You will designate a qualified researcher to answer any questions she has—any at all—about the life she might have had, or the course of events England took when the queen did not become a sacred Hostage."

Brill nodded stiffly.

"Good-bye, Your Grace," Her Holiness said. "I shall return in two weeks to inspect your situation again."

Two weeks? The High Priest was not due for another inspection for six months. Lambert glanced at Culhane to see his reaction to this blatant political fault-hunting, but he was gazing at the floor, to which Anne Boleyn had sunk in another of her embarrassing curtsies, the amber velvet of her skirts spread around her like gold.

They sent a commoner to explain her life to her, the life she had lost. A commoner. And he had as well the nerve to be besotted with her. Anne always knew. She tolerated such fellows, like that upstart musician Smeaton, when they were useful to her. If this Master Culhane dared

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to make any sort of declaration, he would receive the same sort of snub Smeaton once had. Inferior persons should not look to be spoken to as noblemen.

He sat on a straight-backed chair in her Tower room, looking humble enough, while Anne sat in the great carved chair with her hands tightly folded to keep them from shaking.

"Tell me how I came to die in 1536." God's blood! Had ever before there been such a sentence uttered?

Culhane said, "You were beheaded. Found guilty of treason." He stopped, and flushed.

She knew, then. In a queen, there was one cause for a charge of treason. "He charged me with adultery. To remove me, so he could marry again."

"Yes."

"To Jane Seymour."

"Yes."

"Had I first given him a son?"

"No," Culhane said.

"Did Jane Seymour give him a son?"

"Yes. Edward VI. But he died at sixteen, a few years after Henry."

There was vindication in that, but not enough to stem the sick feeling in her gut. Treason. And no son. . . . There must have been more than desire for the Seymour bitch. Henry must have hated her. Adultery . . .

"With whom?"

Again the oaf flushed. "With five men, Your Grace. Everyone knew the charges were false, created merely to excuse his own adultery—even your enemies admitted such."

"Who were they?"

"Sir Henry Norris. Sir Francis Weston. William Brereton. Mark Smeaton. And . . . and your brother George."

For a moment she thought she would be sick. Each name fell like a blow, and the last like the axe itself. George. Her beloved brother, so talented at music, so high-spirited and witty . . . Henry Norris, the King's friend. Weston and Brereton, young and light-hearted but always, to her, respectful and careful . . . and Mark Smeaton, the oaf made courtier because he could play the virginals.

The long, beautiful hands clutched the sides of the chair. But the moment passed, and she could say with dignity, "They denied the charges?"

"Smeaton confessed, but he was tortured into it. The others denied the charges completely. Henry Norris offered to defend your honor in single combat."

Yes, that was like Harry: so old-fashioned, so principled. She said, "They all died." It was not a question: If she had died for treason, they would have, too. And not alone; no one died alone. "Who else?"

Culhane said, "Maybe we should wait for the rest of this, Your—"

"Who else? My father?"

"No. Sir Thomas More, John Fisher—"

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"More? For my . . . " she could not say *adultery.*

"Because he would not swear to the Oath of Supremacy, which made the king and not the pope head of the Church in England. That act opened the door to religious dissension in England."

"It did not. The heretics were already strong in England. History cannot fault that to me!"

"Not as strong as they would become," Culhane said, almost apologetically. "Queen Mary was known as Bloody Mary for burning heretics who used the Act of Supremacy to break from Rome—Your Grace! Are you all right . . . Anne!"

"Do not touch me," she said. Queen Mary. Then her own daughter Elizabeth had been disinherited, or killed. . . . Had Henry become so warped that he would kill a child? His own child? Unless he had come to believe . . .

She whispered, "Elizabeth?"

Comprehension flooded his eyes. "Oh, no, Anne! No! Mary ruled first, as the elder, but when she died heirless, Elizabeth was only twenty-five. Elizabeth became the greatest ruler England had ever known! She ruled for forty-four years, and under her England became a great power."

The greatest ruler. Her baby Elizabeth. Anne could feel her hands unknotting on the ugly artificial chair. Henry had not repudiated Elizabeth, nor had her killed. She had become the greatest ruler England had ever known.

Culhane said, "This is why we thought it best not to tell you all this."

She said coldly, "I will be the judge of that."

"I'm sorry." He sat stiffly, hands dangling awkwardly between his knees. He looked like a plowman, like that oaf Smeaton. . . . She remembered what Henry had done, and rage returned.

"I stood accused. With five men . . . with George. And the charges were false." Something in his face changed. Anne faced him steadily. "Unless . . . were they false, Master Culhane? You who know so much of history—does history say—" She could not finish. To beg for history's judgment from a man like this . . . no humiliation had ever been greater. Not even the Spanish Ambassador, referring to her as "the Concubine," had ever humiliated her so.

Culhane said carefully, "History is silent on the subject, Your Grace. What your conduct was . . . would have been . . . is known only to you."

"As it should be. It was . . . would have been . . . mine," she said viciously, mocking his tones perfectly. He looked at her like a wounded puppy, like that lout Smeaton when she had snubbed him. "Tell me this, Master Culhane. You have changed history as it would have been, you tell me. Will my daughter Elizabeth still become the greatest ruler England has ever seen—in *my* 'time stream'? Or will that be altered, too, by your quest for peace at any cost?"

"We don't know. I explained to you. . . . We can only watch your time stream now as it unfolds. It had only reached October, 1533, which is why after analyzing our own history we—"

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"You have explained all that. It will be sixty years from now before you know if my daughter will still be great. Or if you have changed that as well by abducting me and ruining my life."

"Abducting! You were going to be killed! Accused, beheaded—"

"And you have prevented that." She rose, in a greater fury than ever she had been with Henry, with Wolsey, with anyone. "You have also robbed me of my remaining three years as surely as Henry would have robbed me of my old age. And you have mayhap robbed my daughter as well, as Henry sought to do with his Seymour-get prince. So what is the difference between you, Master Culhane, that you are a saint and Henry a villain? He held me in the Tower until my soul could be commended to God; you hold me here in this castle you say I can never leave where time does not exist, and mayhap God neither. Who has done me the worse injury? Henry gave me the crown. You—all you and my Lord Brill have given me is a living death, and then given my daughter's crown a danger and uncertainty that without you she would not have known! Who has done to Elizabeth and me the worse turn? And in the name of preventing war! *War!* You have made war upon *me!* Get out, get out!"

"Your—"

"Get out! I never want to see you again! If I am in hell, let there be one less demon!"

Lambert slipped from her monitor to run down the corridor. Culhane flew from the room; behind him the sound of something heavy struck the door. Culhane slumped against it, his face pasty around his cheek dye. Almost Lambert could find it in herself to pity him. Almost.

She said softly, "I told you so."

"She's like a wild thing."

"You knew she could be. It's documented enough, Culhane. I've put a suicide watch on her."

"Yes. Good. I . . . she was like a wild thing."

Lambert peered at him. "You still want her! After that!"

That sobered him; he straightened and looked at her coldly. "She is a Holy Hostage, Lambert."

"I remember that. Do you?"

"Don't insult me, Intern."

He moved angrily away; she caught his sleeve. "Culhane—don't be angry. I only meant that the sixteenth century was so different from our own, but s—"

"Do you think I don't know that? I was doing historical research while you were learning to read, Lambert. Don't instruct *me*."

He stalked off. Lambert bit down hard on her own fury and stared at Anne Boleyn's closed door. No sound came from behind it. To the soundless door she finished her sentence: "—but some traps don't change."

The door didn't answer. Lambert shrugged. It had nothing to do with her. She didn't care what happened to Anne Boleyn, in this century or that other one. Or to Culhane, either. Why should she? There were other

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men. She was no Henry VIII, to bring down her world for passion. What was the good of being a time researcher, if you could not even learn from times past?

She leaned thoughtfully against the door, trying to remember the name of the beautiful boy in her Orientation lecture, the one with the violet eyes.

She was still there, thinking, when Toshio Brill called a staff meeting to announce, his voice stiff with anger, that Her Holiness of the Church of the Holy Hostage had filed a motion with the All-World Forum that the Time Research Institute, because of the essentially reverent nature of the Time Rescue program, be removed from administration by the Forum and placed instead under the direct control of the Church.

She had to think. It was important to think, as she had thought through her denial of Henry's ardor, and her actions when that ardor waned. Thought was all.

She could not return to her London, to Elizabeth. They had told her that. But did she know beyond doubt that it was true?

Anne left her apartments. At the top of the stairs she usually took to the garden she instead turned and opened another door. It opened easily. She walked along a different corridor. Apparently even now no one was going to stop her.

And if they did, what could they do to her? They did not use the scaffold or the rack; she had determined this from talking to that oaf Culhane and that huge ungainly woman, Lady Mary Lambert. They did not believe in violence, in punishment, in death. (How could you not believe in death? Even *they* must one day die.) The most they could do to her was shut her up in her rooms, and there the female pope would come to see she was well-treated.

Essentially they were powerless.

The corridor was lined with doors, most set with small windows. She peered in: rooms with desks and machines, rooms without desks and machines, rooms with people seated around a table talking, kitchens, still rooms. No one stopped her. At the end of the corridor she came to a room without a window and tried the door. It was locked, but as she stood there, her hand still on the knob, the door opened from within.

"Lady Anne! Oh!"

Could no one in this accursed place get her name right? The woman who stood there was clearly a servant, although she wore the same ugly gray-green tunic as everyone else. Perhaps, like Lady Mary, she was really an apprentice. She was of no interest, but behind her was the last thing Anne expected to see in this place: a child.

She pushed past the servant and entered the room. It was a little boy, his dress strange but clearly a uniform of some sort. He had dark eyes, curling dark hair, a bright smile. How old? Perhaps four. There was an air about him that was unmistakable; she would have wagered her life this child was royal.

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"Who are you, little one?"

He answered her with an outpouring of a language she did not know. The servant scrambled to some device on the wall; in a moment Culhane stood before her.

"You said you didn't want to see me, Your Grace. But I was closest to answer Kiti's summons . . . "

Anne looked at him. It seemed to her that she looked clear through him, to all that he was: desire, and pride of his pitiful strange learning, and smugness of his holy mission that had brought her life to wreck. Hers, and perhaps Elizabeth's as well. She saw Culhane's conviction, shared by Lord Director Brill and even by such as Lady Mary, that what they did was right because they did it. She knew that look well: It had been Cardinal Wolsey's, Henry's right-hand man and Chancellor of England, the man who had advised Henry to separate Anne from Harry Percy. And advised Henry against marrying her. Until she, Anne Boleyn, upstart Tom Boleyn's powerless daughter, had turned Henry against Wolsey and had the Cardinal brought to trial. *She.*

In that minute, she made her decision.

"I was wrong, Master Culhane. I spoke in anger. Forgive me." She smiled, and held out her hand, and she had the satisfaction of watching Culhane turn color.

How old was he? Not in his first youth. But neither had Henry been.

He said, "Of course, Your Grace. Kiti said you talked to the Tsarevich."

She made a face, still smiling at him. She had often mocked Henry thus. Even Harry Percy, so long ago, a lifetime ago. . . . No. Two lifetimes ago. "The what?"

"The Tsarevich." He indicated the child.

Was the dye on his face permanent, or would it wash off?

She said, not asking, "He is another Time Hostage. He, too, in his small person, prevents a war."

Culhane nodded, clearly unsure of her mood. Anne looked wonderingly at the child, then winningly at Culhane. "I would have you tell me about him. What language does he speak? Who is he?"

"Russian. He is—was—the future emperor. He suffers from a terrible disease: You called it the bleeding sickness. Because his mother the empress was so driven with worry over him, she fell under the influence of a holy man who led her to make some disastrous decisions while she was acting for her husband the Emperor, who was away at war."

Anne said, "And the bad decisions brought about another war."

"They made more bloody than necessary a major rebellion."

"You prevent rebellions as well as wars? Rebellions against a monarchy?"

"Yes, it—history did not go in the direction of monarchies."

That made little sense. How could history go other than in the direction of those who were divinely anointed, those who held the power? Royalty won. In the end, they always won.

But there could be many casualties before the end.

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She said, with that combination of liquid dark gaze and aloof body that had so intrigued Henry—and Norris, and Wyatt, and even presumptuous Mark Smeaton, God damn his soul—"I find I wish to know more about this child and his country's history. Will you tell me?"

"Yes," Culhane said. She caught the nature of his smile: relieved, still uncertain how far he had been forgiven, eager to find out. Familiar, all so familiar.

She was careful not to let her body touch his as they passed through the doorway. But she went first, so he would catch the smell of her hair.

"Master Culhane—you are listed on the demon machine as 'M. Culhane.' "

"The . . . oh, the computer. I didn't know you ever looked at one."

"I did. Through a window."

"It's not a demon, Your Grace."

She let the words pass; what did she care what it was? But his tone told her something. He liked reassuring her. In this world where women did the same work as men and female bodies were to be seen uncovered in the exercise yard so often that even turning your head to look must become a bore, this oaf nonetheless liked reassuring her.

She said, "What does the 'M' mean?"

He smiled. "Michael. Why?"

As the door closed, the captive royal child began once more to wail.

Anne smiled, too. "An idle fancy. I wondered if it stood for Mark."

"What argument has the Church filed with the All-World Forum?" a senior researcher asked.

Brill said irritably, as if it were an answer, "Where is Mahjoub?"

Lambert spoke up promptly. "He is with Helen of Troy, Director, and the doctor. The queen had another seizure last night." Enzio Mahjoub was the unfortunate Project Head for their last Time Rescue.

Brill ran his hand over the back of his neck. His skull needed shaving, and his cheek dye was sloppily applied. He said, "Then we will begin without Mahjoub. The argument of Her Holiness is that the primary function of this Institute is no longer pure time research, but practical application, and that the primary practical application is time rescue. As such, we exist to take Hostages, and thus should come under direct control of the Church of the Holy Hostage. Her secondary argument is that the time Hostages are not receiving treatment up to inter-system standards as specified by the All-World Accord of 2154."

Lambert's eyes darted around the room. Cassia Kohambu, Project Head for the Institute's greatest success, sat up straight, looking outraged. "Our Hostages aren't—on what are these charges allegedly based?"

Brill said, "No formal charges as yet. Instead, she has requested an investigation. She claims we have hundreds of potential Hostages pinpointed by the Rahvoli equations, and the ones we have chosen do not meet standards for either internal psychic stability or benefit accrued to the hostages themselves, as specified in the All-World Accord. We

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have chosen to please ourselves, with flagrant disregard for the welfare of the Hostages."

"Flagrant disregard!" It was Culhane, already on his feet. Beneath the face dye his cheeks flamed. Lambert eyed him carefully. "How can Her Holiness charge flagrant disregard when without us the Tsarevich Alexis would have been in constant pain from hemophiliac episodes, Queen Helen would have been abducted and raped, Herr Hitler blown up in an underground bunker, and Queen Anne Boleyn beheaded!"

Brill said bluntly, "Because the Tsarevich cries constantly for his mother, the Lady Helen is mad, and Mistress Boleyn tells the Church she has been made war upon!"

Well, Lambert thought, that still left Herr Hitler. She was just as appalled as anyone at Her Holiness's charges, but Culhane had clearly violated both good manners and good sense. Brill never appreciated being upstaged.

Brill continued, "An investigative committee from the All-World Forum will arrive here next month. It will be small: Delegates Soshiru, Vlakhav, and Tullio. In three days the Institute staff will meet again at 0700, and by that time I want each project group to have prepared an argument in favor of the Hostage you hold. Use the pre-permit justifications, including all the mathematical models, but go far beyond that in documenting benefits to the Hostages themselves since they arrived here. Are there any questions?"

Only one, Lambert thought. She stood. "Director—were the three delegates who will investigate us chosen by the All-World Forum or requested by Her Holiness? To whom do they already owe their allegiance?"

Brill looked annoyed. He said austerely, "I think we can rely upon the All-World delegates to file a fair report, Intern Lambert," and Lambert lowered her eyes. Evidently she still had much to learn. The question should not have been asked aloud.

Would Mistress Boleyn have known that?

Anne took the hand of the little boy. "Come, Alexis," she said. "We walk now."

The prince looked up at her. How handsome he was, with his thick curling hair and beautiful eyes almost as dark as her own. If she had given Henry such a child . . . She pushed the thought away. She spoke to Alexis in her rudimentary Russian, without using the translator box hung like a peculiarly ugly pendant around her neck. He answered with a stream of words she couldn't follow, and she waited for the box to translate.

"Why should we walk? I like it here in the garden."

"The garden is very beautiful," Anne agreed. "But I have something interesting to show you."

Alexis trotted beside her obediently then. It had not been hard to win his trust—had no one here ever passed time with children? Wash off the scary cheek paint, play for him songs on the lute—an instrument he

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could understand, not like the terrifying sounds coming without musicians from yet another box—learn a few phrases of his language. She had always been good at languages.

Anne led the child through the far gate of the walled garden, into the yard. Machinery hummed; naked men and women "exercised" together on the grass. Alexis watched them curiously, but Anne ignored them. Servants. Her long full skirts, tawny silk, trailed on the ground.

At the far end of the yard she started down the short path to that other gate, the one that ended at nothing.

Queen Isabella of Spain, Henry had told Anne once, had sent an expedition of sailors to circumnavigate the globe. They were supposed to find a faster way to India. They had not done so, but neither had they fallen off the edge of the world, which many had prophesied for them. Anne had not shown much interest in the story, because Isabella had after all been Catherine's mother. The edge of the world.

The gate ended with a wall of nothing. Nothing to see, or smell, or taste—Anne had tried. To the touch the wall was solid enough, and faintly tingly. A "force field," Culhane said. Out of time as we experience it; out of space. The gate, one of three, led to a place called Upper Slib, in what had once been Egypt.

Anne lifted Alexis. He was heavier than even a month ago; since she had been attending him every day, he had begun to eat better, play more, cease crying for his mother. Except at night. "Look, Alexis, a gate. Touch it."

The little boy did, then drew back his hand at the tingling. Anne laughed, and after a moment Alexis laughed, too.

The alarms sounded.

"Why, Your Grace?" Culhane said. "Why *again?*"

"I wished to see if the gate was unlocked," Anne said coolly. "We both wished to see." This was a lie. She knew it—did he? Not yet, perhaps.

"I told you, Your Grace, it is not a gate that can be left locked or unlocked, as you understand the terms. It must be activated by the stasis Square."

"Then do so; the Prince and I wish for an outing."

Culhane's eyes darkened; each time, he was in more anguish. And each time, he came running. However much he might wish to avoid her, commanding his henchmen to talk to her most of the time, he must come when there was an emergency because he was her gaoler, appointed by Lord Brill. So much had Anne discovered in a month of careful trials. He said now, "I told you, Your Grace, you can't move past the force field, no more than I could move into your palace at Greenwich. In the time stream beyond that gate—*my* time stream—you don't exist. The second you crossed the force field you'd disintegrate into nothingness."

Nothingness again. To Alexis she said sadly in Russian, "He will never let us out. Never, never."

The child began to cry. Anne held him closer, looking reproachfully

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at Culhane, who was shifting toward anger. She caught him just before the shift was complete, befuddling him with un-looked-for wistfulness: "It is just that there is so little we can do here, in this time where we do not belong. You can understand that, can you not, Master Culhane? Would it not be the same for you, in my Court of England?"

Emotions warred on his face. Anne put her free hand gently on his arm. He looked down: the long slim fingers with their delicate tendons, the tawny silk against his drab uniform. He choked out, "Anything in my power, anything within the rules, Your Grace . . . "

She had not yet gotten him to blurt out "Anne," as he had the day she'd thrown a candlestick after him at the door.

She removed her hand, shifted the sobbing child against her neck, spoke so softly he could not hear her.

He leaned forward, toward her. "What did you say, Your Grace?"

"Would you come again tonight to accompany my lute on your guitar? For Alexis and me?

Culhane stepped back. His eyes looked trapped.

"Please, Master Culhane?"

Culhane nodded.

Lambert stared at the monitor. It showed the hospital suite, barred windows and low white pallets, where Helen of Troy was housed. The queen sat quiescent on the floor, as she usually did, except for the brief and terrifying periods when she erupted, shrieking and tearing at her incredible hair. There had never been a single coherent word in the eruptions, not since the first moment Helen had awoken as Hostage and had been told where she was, and why. Since that day Queen Helen had never responded in the slightest to anything said to her. Or maybe that fragile mind, already quivering under the strain of her affair with Paris, had snapped too completely to even hear them. Helen, Lambert thought, was no Anne Boleyn.

Anne sat close to the mad Greek queen, her silk skirts overlapping Helen's white tunic, her slender body leaning so far forward that her hair, too, mingled with Helen's, straight black waterfall with masses of springing black curls. Before she could stop herself, Lambert had run her hand over her own shaved head.

What was Mistress Anne trying to say to Helen? The words were too low for the microphones to pick up, and the double curtain of hair hid Anne's lips. Yet Lambert was as certain as death that Anne was talking. And Helen, quiescent—was she nonetheless hearing? What could it matter if she *were,* words in a tongue that from her point of view would not exist for another two millennia?

Yet the Boleyn woman visited her every day, right after she left the Tsarevich. How good was Anne, from a time almost as barbaric as Helen's own, at non-verbal coercion of the crazed?

Culhane entered, glanced at the monitor, and winced.

Lambert said levelly, "You're a fool, Culhane."

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He didn't answer.

"You go whenever she summons. You—"

He suddenly strode across the room, two strides at a time. Grabbing Lambert, he pulled her from her chair and yanked her to her feet. For an astonished moment she thought he was actually going to hit her—two Researchers *hitting* each other. She tensed to slug him back. But abruptly he dropped her, giving a little shove so that she tumbled gracelessly back into her chair.

"You feel like a fat stone."

Lambert stared at him. Indifferently, he activated his own console and began work. Something rose in her, so cold the vertebrae of her back felt fused in ice. Stiffly she rose from the chair, left the room, and walked along the corridor.

A fat stone. Heavy, stolid yet doughy, the flesh yielding like a slug, or a maggot. Bulky, without grace, without beauty, almost without individuality, as stones were all alike. A fat stone.

Anne Boleyn was just leaving Helen's chamber. In the corridor, back to the monitor, Lambert faced her. Her voice was low, like a subterranean growl. "Leave him alone."

Anne looked at her coolly. She did not ask whom Lambert meant.

"Don't you know you are watched every minute? That you can't so much as use your chamberpot without being taped? How do you ever expect to get him to your bed? Or to do anything with poor Helen?"

Anne's eyes widened. She said loudly, "Even when I use the chamberpot? Watched? Have I not even the privacy of the beasts in the field?"

Lambert clenched her fists. Anne was acting. Someone had already told her, or she had guessed, about the surveillance. Lambert could *see* that she was acting—but not *why*. A part of her mind noted coolly that she had never wanted to kill anyone before. So this, finally, was what it felt like, all those emotions she had researched throughout time: fury and jealousy and the desire to destroy. The emotions that started wars.

Anne cried, even more loudly, "I had been better had you never told me!" and rushed toward her own apartments.

Lambert walked slowly back to her work area, a fat stone.

Anne lay on the grass between the two massive power generators. It was a poor excuse for grass; although green enough, it had no smell. No dew formed on it, not even at night. Culhane had explained that it was bred to withstand disease, and that no dew formed because the air had little moisture. He explained, too, that the night was as man-bred as the grass; there was no natural night here. Henry would have been highly interested in such things; she was not. But she listened carefully, as she listened to everything Michael said.

She lay completely still, waiting. Eventually the head of a Researcher thrust around the corner of the towering machinery: a purposeful thrust. "Your Grace? What are you doing?"

Anne did not answer. Getting to her feet, she walked back toward the

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castle. The place between the generators was no good: The woman had already known where Anne was.

The three delegates from the All-World Forum arrived at the Time Research Institute looking apprehensive. Lambert could understand this; for those who had never left their own time-space continuum, it probably seemed significant to step through a force field to a place that did not exist in any accepted sense of the word. The delegates looked at the ground, and inspected the facilities, and asked the same kinds of questions visitors always asked, before they settled down to actually investigate anything.

They were given an hour's overview of the time rescue program, presented by the Director himself. Lambert, who had not helped write this, listened to the careful sentiments about the prevention of war, the nobility of Hostages, the deep understanding the Time Research Institute held of the All-World Accord of 2154, the altruistic extension of the Holy Mission of Peace into other time streams. Brill then moved on to discuss the four time Hostages, dwelling heavily on the first. In the four years since Herr Hitler had become a Hostage, the National Socialist Party had all but collapsed in Germany. President Paul von Hindenburg had died on schedule, and the new moderate Chancellors were slowly bringing order to Germany. The economy was still very bad and unrest was widespread, but no one was arresting Jews or Gypsies or homosexuals or Jehovah's Witnesses or . . . Lambert stopped listening. The delegates knew all this. The entire solar system knew all this. Hitler had been a tremendous popular success as a Hostage, the reason the Institute had obtained permits for the next three. Herr Hitler was kept in his locked suite, where he spent his time reading power-fantasy novels whose authors had not been born when the bunker under Berlin was detonated.

"Very impressive, Director," Goro Soshiru said. He was small, thin, elongated, a typical free-fall Spacer, with a sharp mind and a reputation for incorruptibility. "May we now talk to the Hostages, one at a time?"

"Without any monitors. That is our instruction," said Anna Vlakhav. She was the senior member of the investigative team, a sleek, gray Chinese who refused all augments. Her left hand, Lambert noticed, trembled constantly. She belonged to the All-World Forum's Inner Council and had once been a Hostage herself for three years.

"Please," Soren Tullio smiled. He was young, handsome, very wealthy. Disposable, added by the Forum to fill out the committee, with few recorded views of his own. Insomuch as they existed, however, they were not tinged with any bias toward the Church. Her Holiness had not succeeded in naming the members of the investigative committee—if indeed she had tried.

"Certainly," Brill said. "We've set aside the private conference room for your use. As specified by the Church, it is a sanctuary: There are no monitors of any kind. I would recommend, however, that you allow the

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bodyguard to remain with Herr Hitler, although of course you will make up your own minds."

Delegate Vlakhav said, "The bodyguard may stay. Herr Hitler is not our concern here."

Surprise, Lambert thought. Guess who *is?*

The delegates kept Hitler only ten minutes, the catatonic Helen only three. They said the queen did not speak. They talked to the little Tsarevich a half hour. They kept Anne Boleyn in the sanctuary/conference room four hours and twenty-three minutes.

She came out calm, blank-faced, and proceeded to her own apartments. Behind her the three delegates were tight-lipped and silent. Anna Vlakhav, the former Hostage, said to Toshio Brill, "We have no comment at this time. You will be informed."

Brill's eyes narrowed. He said nothing.

The next day, Director Toshio Brill was subpoenaed to appear before the All-World Forum on the gravest of all charges: mistreating Holy Hostages detained to keep Peace. The tribunal would consist of the full Inner Council of the All-World Forum. Since Director Brill had the right to confront those who accused him, the investigation would be held at the Time Research Institute.

How, Lambert wondered? They would not take her unsupported word. How had the woman done it?

She said to Culhane, "The Delegates evidently make no distinction between political Hostages on our own world and time Hostages snatched from shadowy parallel ones."

"Why should they?" coldly said Culhane. The idealist. And where had it brought him?

Lambert was assigned that night to monitor the Tsarevich, who was asleep in his crib. She sat in her office, her screen turned to Anne Boleyn's chambers, watching her play on the lute and sing softly to herself the songs written for her by Henry VIII when his passion was new and fresh, six hundred years before.

Anne sat embroidering a sleeve cover of cinnamon velvet. In strands of black silk she worked intertwined H and A: Henry and Anne. Let their spying machines make of that what they would.

The door opened and, without permission, Culhane entered. He stood by her chair and looked down into her face. "Why, Anne? Why?"

She laughed. He had finally called her by her Christian name. Now, when it could not possibly matter.

When he saw that she would not answer, his manner grew formal. "A lawyer has been assigned to you. He arrives tomorrow."

A lawyer. Thomas Cromwell had been a lawyer, and Sir Thomas More. Dead, both of them, at Henry's hand. So had Master Culhane told her, and yet he still believed that protection was afforded by the law.

"The lawyer will review all the monitor records. What you did, what you said, every minute."

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She smiled at him mockingly. "Why tell me this now?"

"It is your right to know."

"And you are concerned with rights. Almost as much as with death." She knotted the end of her thread and cut it. "How is it that you command so many machines and yet do not command the knowledge that every man must die?"

"We know that," Culhane said evenly. His desire for her had at last been killed; she could feel its absence, like an empty well. The use of her name had been but the last drop of living water. "But we try to prevent death when we can."

"Ah, but you *can't*. 'Prevent death'—as if it were a fever! You can only postpone it, Master Culhane, and you never even ask if that is worth doing."

"I only came to tell you about the lawyer," Culhane said stiffly. "Good night, Mistress Boleyn."

"Good night, Michael," she said, and started to laugh. She was still laughing when the door closed behind him.

The Hall of Time, designed to hold three hundred, was packed.

Lambert remembered the day she had given the Orientation lecture to the history candidates, among them what's-his-name of the violet eyes. Twenty young people huddled together against horror in the middle of Squares, virtual and simulated, but not really present. Today the Squares were absent and the middle of the floor was empty, while all four sides were lined ten-deep with All-World Inner Council members on high polished benches, archbishops and lamas and shamans of the Church of the Holy Hostage, and reporters from every major newsgrid in the solar system. Her Holiness the High Priest sat among her followers, pretending she wanted to be inconspicuous. Toshio Brill sat in a chair alone, facing the current Premier of the All-World Council, Dagar Krenya of Mars.

Anne Boleyn was led to a seat. She walked with her head high, her long black skirts sweeping the floor.

Lambert remembered that Anne had worn black to her trial for treason, in 1536.

"This investigation will begin," Premier Krenya said. He wore his hair to his shoulders; fashions must have changed again on Mars. Lambert looked at the shaved heads of her colleagues, at the long loose black hair of Anne Boleyn. To Culhane, seated beside her, she whispered, "We'll be growing our hair again soon." He looked at her as if she were crazy.

It *was* a kind of crazy, to live everything twice: once in research, once in the flesh. Did it seem so to Anne Boleyn? Lambert knew her frivolity was misplaced, and she thought of the frivolity of Anne in the Tower, awaiting execution: "They will have no trouble finding a name for me. I shall be Queen Anne Lackhead." At the memory, Lambert's hatred burst out fresh. She had the memory, and now Anne never would. But in bequeathing it forward in time to Lambert, the memory had become second-hand. That was Anne Boleyn's real crime, for which she would

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never be tried: She had made this whole proceeding, so important to Lambert and Brill and Culhane, a mere re-enactment. Pre-scripted. Second-hand. She had robbed them of their own, unused time.

Krenya said, "The charges are as follows: That the Time Research Institute has mistreated the Holy Hostage Anne Boleyn, held Hostage against war. Three counts of mistreatment are under consideration this day: First, that researchers willfully increased a Hostage's mental anguish by dwelling on the pain of those left behind by the Hostage's confinement, and on those aspects of confinement that cause emotional unease. Second, that researchers failed to choose a hostage that would truly prevent war. Third, that researchers willfully used a hostage for sexual gratification."

Lambert felt herself go very still. Beside her, Culhane rose to his feet, then sat down again slowly, his face rigid. Was it possible he had . . . no. He had been infatuated, but not to the extent of throwing away his career. He was not Henry, any more than she had been over *him*.

The spectators buzzed, an uneven sound like malfunctioning equipment. Krenya rapped for order. "Director Brill—how do you answer these charges?"

"False, Premier. Every one."

"Then let us hear the evidence against the Institute."

Anne Boleyn was called. She took the chair in which Brill had been sitting. *"She made an entry as though she were going to a great triumph and sat down with elegance"* . . . but that was the other time, the *first* time. Lambert groped for Culhane's hand. It felt limp.

"Mistress Boleyn," Krenya said—he had evidently not been told that she insisted on being addressed as a queen, and the omission gave Lambert a mean pleasure—"In what ways was your anguish willfully increased by researchers at this Institute?"

Anne held out her hand. To Lambert's astonishment, her lawyer put into it a lute. At an official All-World Forum investigation—a *lute*. Anne began to play, the tune high and plaintive. Her unbound black hair fell forward; her slight body made a poignant contrast to the torment in the words:

Defiled is my name, full sore,
Through cruel spite and false report,
That I may say forever more,
Farewell to joy, adieu comfort.

Oh death, rock me asleep,
Bring on my quiet rest,
Let pass my very guiltless ghost
Out of my careful breast.

Ring out the doleful knell,
Let its sound my death tell,

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For I must die,
There is no remedy,
For now I die!

The last notes faded. Anne looked directly at Krenya. "I wrote that, my Lords, in my other life. Master Culhane of this place played it for me, along with death songs written by my . . . my brother . . . "

"Mistress Boleyn . . ."

"No, I recover myself. George's death tune was hard for me to hear, my Lords. Accused and condemned because of *me,* who always loved him well."

Krenya said to the lawyer whose staff had spent a month reviewing every moment of monitor records, "Culhane made her listen to these?"

"Yes," the lawyer said. Beside Lambert, Culhane sat unmoving.

"Go on," Krenya said to Anne.

"He told me that I was made to suffer watching the men accused with me die. How I was led to a window overlooking the block, how my brother George knelt, putting his head on the block, how the axe was raised—" She stopped, shuddering. A murmur ran over the room. It sounded like cruelty, Lambert thought—but *whose?*

"Worst of all, my Lords," Anne said, "was that I was told I had bastardized my own child. I chose to sign a paper declaring no valid marriage had ever existed because I had been pre-contracted to Sir Henry Percy, so my daughter Elizabeth was illegitimate and thus barred from her throne. I was taunted with the fact that I had done this, ruining the prospects of my own child. He said it over and over, Master Culhane did . . ."

Krenya said to the lawyer, "Is this in the visuals?"

"Yes."

Krenya turned back to Anne. "But, Mistress Boleyn—these are things that, because of your time rescue, did *not* happen. *Will* not happen, in your time stream. How can they thus increase your anguish for relatives left behind?"

Anne stood. She took one step forward, then stopped. Her voice was low and passionate. "My good Lord—do you not understand? It is because you took me here that these things did not happen. Left to my own time, I *would have been responsible for them all.* For my brother's death, for the other four brave men, for my daughter's bastardization, for the torment in my own music . . . I have escaped them only because of *you.* To tell me them in such detail, not the mere provision of facts that I myself requested but agonizing detail of mind and heart—is to tell me that *I* alone, in my own character, am evil, giving pain to those I love most. And that in this time stream you have brought me to, I *did* these things, felt them, feel them still. You have made me guilty of them. My Lord Premier, have you ever been a Hostage yourself? Do you know, or can you imagine, the torment that comes from imagining the grief of those who love you? And to know you have *caused* this grief, not merely loss

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but death, blood, the pain of disinheritance—that you have caused it, and are now being told of the anguish you cause? Told over and over? In words, in song even—can you imagine what that feels like to one such as I, who cannot return at will and comfort those hurt by my actions?"

The room was silent. Who, Lambert wondered, had told Anne Boleyn that Premier Krenya had once served as Holy Hostage?

"Forgive me, my Lords," Anne said dully, "I forget myself."

"Your testimony may take whatever form you choose," Krenya said, and it seemed to Lambert that there were shades and depths in his voice.

The questioning continued. A Researcher, said Anne, had taunted her with being spied on even at her chamberpot—Lambert leaned slowly forward—which had made Anne cry out, "I had been better had you never told me!" Since then, modesty had made her reluctant to even answer nature, "so that there is every hour a most wretched twisting and churning in my bowels."

Asked why she thought the Institute had chosen the wrong Hostage, Anne said she had been told so by my Lord Brill. The room exploded into sound, and Krenya rapped for quiet. "That visual now, please." On a Square created in the center of the room, the visuals replayed on three sides:

"My Lord Brill . . . Was there no other person you could take but I to prevent this war you say is a hundred years off? This civil war in England?"

"The mathematics identified you as the best Hostage, Your Grace."

"The best? Best for what, my Lord? If you had taken Henry himself, then he could not have issued the Act of Supremacy. His supposed death would have served the purpose as well as mine."

"Yes. But for Henry VIII to disappear from history while his heir is but a month old. . . . We did not know if that might not have started a civil war in itself. Between the factions supporting Elizabeth and those for Queen Catherine, who was still alive."

"What did your mathematical learning tell you?"

"That it probably would not," Brill said.

"And yet choosing me instead of Henry left him free to behead yet another wife, as you yourself have told me, my cousin Catherine Howard!"

Brill shifted on his chair. "That is true, Your Grace."

"Then why not Henry instead of me?"

"I'm afraid Your Grace does not have sufficient grasp of the science of probabilities for me to explain, Your Grace."

Anne was silent. Finally she said, "I think that the probability is that you would find it easier to deal with a deposed woman than with Henry of England, whom no man can withstand in either a passion or a temper."

Brill did not answer. The visual rolled—ten seconds, fifteen—and he did not answer.

"Mr. Premier," Brill said in a choked voice, "Mr. Premier—"

"You will have time to address these issues soon, Mr. Director," Krenya said. "Mistress Boleyn, this third charge—sexual abuse—"

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The term had not existed in the sixteenth century, thought Lambert. Yet Anne understood it. She said, "I was frightened, my Lord, by the strangeness of this place. I was afraid for my life. I didn't know then that a woman may refuse those in power, may—"

"That is why sexual contact with Hostages is universally forbidden," Krenya said. "Tell us what you think happened."

Not what did happen—what you *think* happened. Lambert took heart.

Anne said, "Master Culhane bade me meet him at a place . . . it is a small alcove beside a short flight of stairs near the kitchens. . . . He bade me meet him there at night. Frightened, I went."

"Visuals," Krenya said in a tight voice.

The virtual Square re-appeared. Anne, in the same white nightdress in which she had been taken Hostage, crept from her chamber, along the corridor, her body heat registering in infrared. Down the stairs, around to the kitchens, into the cubbyhole formed by the flight of steps, themselves oddly angled as if they had been added, or altered, after the main structure was built, after the monitoring system installed . . . Anne dropped to her knees and crept forward beside the isolated stairs. And disappeared.

Lambert gasped. A time Hostage was under constant surveillance, that was a basic condition of their permit, there was no way the Boleyn bitch could escape constant monitoring. But she had.

"Master Culhane was already there," Anne said in a dull voice. "He . . . he used me ill there."

The room was awash with sound. Krenya said over it, "Mistress Boleyn—there is no visual evidence that Master Culhane was there. He has sworn he was not. Can you offer any proof that he met you there? Anything at all?"

"Yes. Two arguments, my Lord. First: How would I know there were not spying devices in but this one hidden alcove? I did not design this castle; it is not mine."

Krenya's face showed nothing. "And the other argument?"

"I am pregnant with Master Culhane's child."

Pandemonium. Krenya rapped for order. When it was finally restored, he said to Brill, "Did you know of this?"

"No, I . . . it is a Hostage's right by the Accord to refuse intrusive medical treatment . . . she has been healthy . . ."

"Mistress Boleyn, you will be examined by a doctor immediately."

She nodded assent. Watching her, Lambert knew it was true. Anne Boleyn was pregnant, and had defeated herself thereby. But she did not know it yet.

Lambert fingered the knowledge, seeing it as a tangible thing, cold as steel.

"How do we know," Krenya said, "that you were not pregnant before you were taken Hostage?"

"It was but a month after my daughter Elizabeth's birth, and I had

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the white-leg. Ask one of your doctors if a woman would bed a man then. Ask a woman expert in the women of my time. Ask Lady Mary Lambert."

Heads in the room turned; ask whom? Krenya said, "Ask whom?" An aide leaned toward him and whispered something. He said, "We will have her put on the witness list."

Anne said, "I carry Michael Culhane's child. I, who could not carry a prince for the king."

Krenya said, almost powerlessly, "That last has nothing to do with this investigation, Mistress Boleyn."

She only looked at him.

They called Brill to testify, and he threw up clouds of probability equations that did nothing to clarify the choice of Anne over Henry as Holy Hostage. Was the woman right? Had there been a staff meeting to choose between the candidates identified by the Rahvoli applications, and had someone said of two very close candidates, "We should think about the effect on the Institute as well as on history . . . " Had someone been developing a master theory based on a percentage of women influencing history? Had someone had an infatuation with the period, and chosen by that what should be altered? Lambert would never know. She was an intern.

Had been an intern.

Culhane was called. He denied seducing Anne Boleyn. The songs on the lute, the descriptions of her brother's death, the bastardization of Elizabeth—all done to convince her that what she had been saved from was worse than where she had been saved to. Culhane felt so much that he made a poor witness, stumbling over his words, protesting too much.

Lambert was called. As neutrally as possible she said, "Yes, Mr. Premier, historical accounts show that Queen Anne was taken with white-leg after Elizabeth's birth. It is a childbed illness. The legs swell up and ache painfully. It can last from a few weeks to months. We don't know how long it lasted—would have lasted—for Mistress Boleyn."

"And would a woman with this disease be inclined to sexual activity?"

" 'Inclined'—no."

"Thank you, Researcher Lambert."

Lambert returned to her seat. The committee next looked at visuals, hours of visuals—Culhane, flushed and tender, making a fool of himself with Anne. Anne with the little Tsarevich, an exile trying to comfort a child torn from his mother. Helen of Troy, mad and pathetic. Brill, telling newsgrids around the solar system that the time rescue program, savior of countless lives, was run strictly in conformance with the All-World Accord of 2154. And all the time, through all the visuals, Lambert waited for what was known to everyone in that room except Anne Boleyn: That she could not pull off in this century what she might have in Henry's. That the paternity of a child could be genotyped in the womb.

Who? Mark Smeaton, after all? Another miscarriage from Henry, precipitately gotten and unrecorded by history? Thomas Wyatt, her most faithful cousin and cavalier?

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After the committee had satisfied itself that it had heard enough, everyone but Forum delegates was dismissed. Anne, Lambert saw, was led away by a doctor. Lambert smiled to herself. It was already over. The Boleyn was defeated.

The All-World Forum investigative committee deliberated for less than a day. Then it issued a statement: The child carried by Holy Hostage Anne Boleyn had not been sired by Researcher Michael Culhane. Its genotypes matched no one's at the Institute for Time Research. The Institute, however, was guilty of two counts of Hostage mistreatment. The Institute charter as an independent, tax-exempt organization was revoked. Toshio Brill was released from his position, as were Project Head Michael Culhane and intern Mary Lambert. The Institute stewardship was re-assigned to the Church of the Holy Hostage under the direct care of Her Holiness the High Priest.

Lambert slipped through the outside door to the walled garden. It was dusk. On a seat at the far end a figure sat, skirts spread wide, a darker shape against the dark wall. As Lambert approached, Anne looked up without surprise.

"Culhane's gone. I leave tomorrow. Neither of us will ever work in time research again."

Anne went on gazing upward. Those great dark eyes, that slim neck, so vulnerable . . . Lambert clasped her hands together hard.

"*Why?*" Lambert said. "Why do it all again? Last time use a King to bring down the power of the Church, this time use a Church to—before, at least you gained a crown. Why do it here, when you gain nothing?"

"You could have taken Henry. He deserved it; I did not."

"But we didn't take Henry!" Lambert shouted. "So why?"

Anne did not answer. She put out one hand to point behind her. Her sleeve fell away, and Lambert saw clearly the small sixth finger that had marked her as a witch. A tech came running across the half-lit garden. "Researcher Lambert—"

"What is it?"

"They want you inside. Everybody. The queen—the other one, Helen—she's killed herself."

The garden blurred, straightened. "How?"

"Stabbed with a silver sewing scissors hidden in her tunic. It was so quick, the researchers saw it on the monitor but couldn't get there in time."

"Tell them I'm coming."

Lambert looked at Anne Boleyn. "You did this."

Anne laughed. *This lady,* wrote the Tower Constable, *hath much joy in death.* Anne said, "Lady Mary—every birth is a sentence of death. Your age has forgotten that."

"Helen didn't need to die yet. And the Time Research Institute didn't need to be dismantled—it *will* be dismantled. Completely. But somewhere, sometime, you *will* be punished for this. I'll see to that!"

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"Punished, Lady Mary? And mayhap beheaded?"

Lambert looked at Anne: the magnificent black eyes, the sixth finger, the slim neck. Lambert said slowly, "You *want* your own death. As you had it before."

"What else did you leave me?" Anne Boleyn said. "Except the power to live the life that is mine?"

"You will never get it. We don't kill, here!"

Anne smiled. "Then how will you 'punish' me—'sometime, somehow'?"

Lambert didn't answer. She walked back across the walled garden, toward the looming walls gray in the dusk, towards the chamber where lay the other dead queen. ●

NEXT ISSUE

Lawrence Watt-Evans returns to these pages next month with a sequel to his Hugo-winning "Why I Left Harry's All-Night Hamburgers," our sprightly August cover story, "A Flying Saucer with Minnesota Plates," a wry and delicious story that proves that everybody—and we mean *everybody*—eats at Harry's...

ALSO IN AUGUST: **Alexander Jablokov** returns with a complex and thought-provoking novella that shows us how even the smallest of actions can someday have very large consequences indeed, in a compelling study of faith and hope in conflict, called "The Breath of Suspension"; **Janet Kagan** takes us back to the mysterious planet Mirabile for a fast-paced and suspenseful new novella, a new Mama Jason story, in which Mama Jason and her crew find themselves locked in mortal combat with the most dangerous menace they've ever had to face: "Frankenswine"; new writer **Ted Chiang** makes a brilliant *IAsfm* debut with an impressive study of the unexpected new worlds that can open up all around you as soon as you learn to "Understand"; **Terry Bisson,** author of the well-known novel *Talking Man* and of last year's popular "Bears Discover Fire," returns with a sly and funny look at some of the strange consequences of a man's decision to go ahead and "Press Ann"; and madly inventive writer **Phillip C. Jennings** returns to outdo even himself, with a story that's strange (and packed with bizarre new concepts) even by *his* standards, as a College of scholars (who happen to be intelligent plants) find that the asteroid they inhabit has been sent on a deadly collision-course with a partially terraformed Mars, in the strange and compelling "Blossoms." Plus an array of columns and features. Look for our August issue on sale on your newsstands on June 25, 1991.

COMING SOON: A monumental new novella, "Forward the Foundation," by **Isaac Asimov.** Plus new stories by **Mike Resnick, Judith Moffett, R. Garcia y Robertson, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Thomas M. Disch, Tanith Lee, Greg Egan, Tony Daniel, Mary Rosenblum, Ian R. MacLeod, Molly Gloss,** and many others.

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ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

Methodical Madness

The Madness Season

By C. S. Friedman

DAW, $4.95 (paper)

After what seemed like several thousand pages into C. S. Friedman's *The Madness Season* (well, it was really about 250—about half the book's length), I suddenly found myself desperately resisting the impulse to cry out, "Help! I'm trapped in a C.S. Friedman novel, and I'll never get out." There was this feeling that it was going to go on forever . . .

And yet . . . and yet . . . about p. 300, while the novel *qua* novel still never really pulled itself together, the ideas and concepts got so intriguing that I finally got dragged into the thing. Don't get me wrong—this is not the usual plaint about lack of exposition. For the most part, Friedman keeps the complicated ideas, myriad races, and various characters quite clear.

The situation? The known universe has been conquered by the Tyr, a group mind whose gestalt body consists of several subspecies and millions of non-individuals. Earth's humanity, after three or four generations, has been bred down to a subservient population. The Tyr have also conquered several other spcies, and would seem totally invulnerable, due to its collective consciousness and the super technology it has, as it happens, stolen from a vastly knowledgeable and beneficent race, the Saudar, which it has wiped out.

Now obviously the point of the book is to vanquish the unvanquishable Tyr. Against them we have only the Tekk, humans who serve the Tyr in space but who have kept up their own generations-old subliminally rebellious culture; the humans of Yuang, the domeworld, the cream of Earth's scientists who have for years been playing a sort of Penelope-game, researching like mad in all the wrong directions to keep knowledge from the Tyr; and a most unusual hero and heroine. The hero is an immortal human shapechanger (vampire, werewolf, whatall) whose nature has just been discovered by the Tyr and whom they consider possibly a new species, not human. (Don't worry, SF purists —Friedman does a pretty good job of justifying this concept scientifically.) The heroine is female only by courtesy, since she is really a totally alien species, a Marra, a form of intelligence whose supporting structure is a matrix of time and energy, rather than energy and matter, as with humans. I haven't the space to go into the ramifications of this, but take my

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word for it, the Marra is one of the most intriguingly conceived alien species to be come across in all SF, and it's when its true nature begins to be explored that the novel truly takes flight.

So with all these fascinating concepts, what am I bitching about? Well, I could go into some literary jargon involving the shape and rhythm of the novel, but would rather not. Let's just say that it takes Friedman too long to get the wheels of the plot really going, and that there's a certain amount of extraneous matter, such as episodes from the immortal hero's past on Earth that, interesting though they may be, slow the narrative and confuse the issues. Nonetheless, *The Madness Season* is worth the effort involved.

Movie Buff's Delight

The Night Mayor
By Kim Newman
Carroll & Graf, $16.95

A few issues back I reviewed a novel many of the characters of which were actors from the Golden Age of the silver screen, whose spirits lived on as sort of celluloid ghosts. It was not exactly a success, partially because the author was extremely sloppy about his nostalgia knowledge/research. Kim Newman's *The Night Mayor* also takes place in a bizarre locale peopled by actors from '30s and '40s movies; it's a good deal more successful in its homage to mid-century Hollywood, mainly thanks to the author's considerable erudition *re* that time and place.

The novel opens in—and mostly takes place in—the City, a weird amalgam of every urban film made in black and white (question—how many urban films from that period can you remember that were in color?). We view it through the eyes of—whom else?—a second rate private detective named Richie Quick, who witnesses a near-surrealist collection of incidents in such locales as Poverty Row—"far from the swish Metro and Paramount districts . . . on Poverty Row, life had a low budget and a short running time."

The City is peopled by extras, stars, and character actors (and Newman sure knows his character actors; the uninitiate better be prepared for a lot of names s/he won't recognize). One of the incidents Quick sees is the murder of Truro Daine, Mayor of the City. He soon learns from the radio (of course) that he himself is a prime suspect (the announcer adds, "This interruption is *not* part of the Orson Welles and the Mercury Theater presentation, *The Black Path of Fear* by Cornell Woolrich. This is a genuine interruption . . ."). Edward G. Robinson strangles Joan Bennett with her own pearls, and taxi driver Elisha Cook, Jr., gets shot in the head. There's a report from a private detective called Lloyd Nolan that James Stewart's character is completely unblemished even though he once took a swim late at night with a drunken socialite . . .

This madness, as viewed by private eye Quick, alternates with chapters which explain the situation. It's a future where entertainments are full-sensory (twentieth-century movies are called "flatties") and their creators are called Dreamers. The City has been

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dreamed by a master criminal, Truro Daine, who is also a master Dreamer and a connoisseur of flatties. The City dream is so powerful that it looks as if it might take over the government computer, an AI called Yggsdrasil. Another great dreamer, one Tom Tunney, has been sent in to stop this, but has been caught by Daine and trapped in the persona of Richie Quick, a very minor character indeed. And while Quick has witnessed "the Boss's" (Daine's) death, it's obvious he's present in another persona —Laird Creger? Lee Marvin? Neville Brand?

A female dreamer, Susan Bishopric, creator of superheroine Vanessa Vail, is sent in to rescue Tunney and outwit Daine. Can she, Tunney, and Yggsdrasil, who turns up initially in the unlikely guise of John Carradine, find out who Daine is, and best him? The answer is a lot of fun indeed, but unless you know your Golden Age movies, you'll miss a lot of nuance, if only in the myriad character actors who are part of the cast. And so far as I could tell, Newman's knowledge of it all is faultless.

Sure Fire

Fire on the Border
By Kevin O'Donnell, Jr.
Roc, $4.50 (paper)

As you may have noticed, SF that deals mostly with war, weaponry, and battles (for which subgenre there has been no really satisfactory term invented) continues to be popular. If you're not already aware of the fact from the cover or the title, you're clued in that Kevin O'Donnell, Jr.'s *Fire on the Border* is one such because the first fifty, yes, fifty pages are devoted to a space battle—one single space battle.

Now my eyes tend to glaze over after a certain number of passes by fighter ships, attacks at orbital velocity, and losses showing on the computer screens as clouds of dust that used to be friends and shipmates. But I equally realize that a great many readers eat this stuff up, and I guess as this sort of thing goes, O'Donnell's goes well.

His overall war plan is ingenious. Earth and her colonies had been aware of the alien "Wayholder" empire for decades, but due to its insistence no material contact had been maintained. Now suddenly a Wayholder fleet savagely attacks a colony planet and butchers all the inhabitants. It seems that there's an even *nastier* set of aliens on the other side of the Wayholders, and they want to use our colonies as practice battle grounds, which they can get away with since they outnumber and outgun humanity. So while the human government pretends to valiantly defend planet after planet as they are attacked and their inhabitants are slaughtered, it actually does nothing. And only a small band of colonists suspect what is going on . . .

You take it from there. Lots of shootin' and zappin' and whizzing around the spaceways, and battles enough to satisfy the bloodlust of the thirstiest of battle-SF fans. But it's intelligently written and plotted, and O'Donnell has some very neat touches, such as an aging Japanese hero who is cloned and memory updated, and so for the latter half of the novel we have co-heroes,

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one young and just right for the female pilot heroine.

Enigma Variation

The Real Story

By Stephen R. Donaldson
Bantam, $18.95

Now we all know that critics and reviewers are supposed to be omniscient, and if they aren't, they're supposed to do a damn good job of fooling you into thinking they are. But I must admit that there are various things about Stephen R. Donaldson's latest novel that mystify me. The most immediate, even before a word has been read, is that this is the first of a five novel cycle called "The Gap into Conflict." The next four novels are promised to be much longer, but this first one comes in at just over two hundred pages. This is not a complaint per se, mind you; there's no law that says the first novel in a presumed epic series has to be an epic in itself, but you must admit it's a little unusual—I can think of no precedent. (And, no, I am not going into the matter of the cost of a slim hard-cover—literature can't be judged by the pound.)

Then there's the matter of the story. As you might gather from the title, the novel consists of a perceived story and a variation, "the real story." We get the perceived story in the first chapter. With a few details changed, it could as well take place on the Spanish Main in the eighteenth century as the middling near future in which it is set, being a tale of rival pirates, captured ships, and possible treasure. Into Mallory's, a miscreant's den in a bad section of town, comes Angus Thermopyle, a blackguard and a villain, a pirate that even other pirates don't like. (Near future version—the setting is a mining corporation's space station in [I think] the asteroid belt.) He is just back from sinking—er, sorry—zapping a ship from which the only survivor was the captain's beautiful daughter, Morn Hyland. He is keeping her as a slave, and has submitted her to a fate worse than death again and again. (Near future version—there's something called a zone implant which, once installed in a human, gives complete control over them.)

However, at Mallory's, she is seen by Nick Succorso, a swashbuckling rogue in the mold of Errol Flynn, and it's passion at first sight. He succeeds in neatly framing Thermopyle, rescuing Morn, and the two disappear into the sunset (or beltset, or whatever it is that happens out there).

That's the perceived version (perceived by the other customers at Mallory's, mostly). It would, of course, be unfair to give you The Real Story (hey, how's that for a title?). I will say, however, that it is not that sharply in contrast to the other, so if anything in the way of irony or counterpoint were intended, it was lost on me. And I can say that much of it is devoted to Thermopyle's degradation of Morn which, while not horrendously graphic or exploitative, is pretty unpleasant. Now I've nothing against unpleasant. Life is unpleasant. But in my reading, I like at least some compensatory pleasant, and that's not really provided here. It is, in fact, mostly a history of unpleasant people doing unpleasant things to other unpleas-

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ant people.

So another part of my mystification is, so what is this all about? Perhaps the four lengthy novels to follow will clarify it. But I have the feeling that I, for one, am not going to take the time to find out.

Future Out of Date

The Year of the Quiet Sun

By Wilson Tucker

Collier, $4.50 (paper)

I didn't read Wilson Tucker's *The Year of the Quiet Sun* when it first appeared in 1970, but somehow the title has always stayed with me. It's one of those gently evocative titles, which, like most of such, doesn't really mean that much or say that much about the book, but has a resonance of its own.

The novel's major problem is that Tucker did something few SF authors are foolhardy enough to do; that is, set the story in a future so near that it's almost immediately out of date, particularly since it is intensely involved with sociopolitical matters. The bulk of the story takes place in 1978; to make matters worse, it's a time travel story and part of the action takes place in 1980—zap, double out of date. (The remainder of the book takes place around the turn of the century, so in a decade it will be triply out of date.)

Not that that matters a hoot in hell, of course, particularly if the story's a good one. SF is not prediction, and if Tucker's 1978 (or 1980 or 2000) didn't turn out to be exactly as noted, so what? If I even have to justify it to myself, this is an alternate Earth I'm reading about.

Essentially it's the story of the putting-together of a time travel expedition, sponsored by the government and a pet project of the President. The protagonist narrator is chosen to his surprise because he'd created a lengthy futurist study for the government some years back. The other two time travelers are both military men.

Things aren't going very well socially in the country (remember, this was written in 1970, when future catastrophe began to switch from nuclear to sociopolitical), and the government wants facts from the year 2000 to try and avert some of the disasters that seem to be looming. Much to the team's disgust, a trial run is made to 1980 to see if the current president will be reelected. He will be, but things are sliding badly already. Chicago, for instance, is divided in two between whites and blacks by a Berlin-type wall.

Then the real run is made—the team goes one at a time to various turn-of-the-century dates. As with any good time travel story, odd little events which take place during the story, planted by the author and probably not that much noted by the reader, come together to make the unexpected finale.

The Year of the Quiet Sun is a quiet book, made up mostly of character and incident, and, as noted, now totally dated. But I'm not sorry that I was finally able to find out what was behind that haunting title.

Double Armageddon

The World Next Door

By Brad Ferguson

Tor, $3.95 (paper)

There's something suspicious

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about people who are fond of after-the-bomb, post-nuclear holocaust novels. I can say this because I number myself among them. Now I'm not talking about the mutant spawn of the subgenre, the survivalist novel with the emphasis on the exploitation of violence and see-how-many-kinds-of-guns-you-can-name (though some of those are edifying, I admit). No, just the good old-fashioned humdrum tale of people struggling to survive in a post-technological world. I have the feeling we like this setting because we are at heart misanthropes, and the setting of a world with a minimal amount of human beings left in (on?) it is powerfully appealing.

Brad Ferguson has done a neat one with a twist in *The World Next Door*. Mostly it's the story of McAndrew, a small community in the Adirondacks that has pulled itself together several decades after a nuclear war which we eventually learn took place in 1962. We get to know many of the inhabitants, and Ferguson has done a very good job of working out the small details of such a nontech environment (flush toilets still work with water from a bucket, but one flush needs six gallons of water which weighs fifty pounds; food coolers are made from small cheesecloth "tents" with the edges trailing in water).

The major event of the book is the arrival of a team of two "buskers" (one white, one black), and their impact on the community. Trading entertainment and news for food and shelter, theirs is an established occupation much like the traveling minstrels of the middle ages. They tell of many towns once inhabited, now deserted, such as Lake Placid, and of their narrow escape from the self-styled "governor" of the state, who has established himself in the South as a petty warlord with the usual "army" of thugs and sadists. What we don't learn until mid-novel is that a small brigade of such has been dispatched to follow and get the buskers, who insulted the governor by objecting to an unjust execution, and then added insult to injury by escaping. The ending of the novel has something of the satisfying quality of *The Seven Samurai* without the samurai.

But Ferguson has also given a spin to his story with another element. Every other chapter or so is introduced by a long or short section in italics, having to do with a character who is, it seems, an analog of a character in the major narrative (this, at times, takes some figuring, since the differences are enormous in some cases). Most (but not all, which leaves some ambiguities) are involved in a just-about-to-happen nuclear Armageddon (brought on by a destabilized Soviet Union reverting to a military dictatorship and invading Germany) in a future that is the future of our present (are you following this?). This future juxtaposes with McAndrew's future near the end of the novel in a way that SF purists will dismiss as fantasy. So?

The ending will probably also be dismissed by the more cynical readership as fantasy of another sort—the goody-goody kind where children, animals and the good guys (or most of them) come out on top. Hooray, says I. I'm tired of evil

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winning . . . which probably disqualifies me for the really hip and modern critical elite.

Historical (?) Fantasy (?)

Krispos Rising

By Harry Turtledove
Del Rey, $4.95 (paper)

The problem with those of Harry Turtledove's works that I've read is that they're just too Byzantine. No, I don't mean that they are "of, relating to, or characterized by a devious and usually surreptitious manner of operation . . . labyrinthine," which is how my dictionary defines Byzantine. No, I mean that they just have too much to do with the Byzantine Empire. This could possibly be because Mr. Turtledove has a degree in Byzantine history. And his fantasy empires, or more correctly, those imperial settings in which his fantasies are set, seem just too much like the historical Eastern Roman Empire to be very fantastical.

Now I am second to none in my admiration of and interest in the Byzantine Empire. I think it is far underrated and too little known by the average American, whose idea of empire is limited to that of the Roman of *Ben Hur*. And I happen to like historical novels. So I read Turtledove's latest, *Krispos Rising*, with a great deal of enjoyment. It is set in the Empire of Videssos, which is also the name of the capital, and the loosely disguised Byzantine setting of his "Misplaced Legion" quartet of novels (*Krispos Rising* takes place in time before those). I could cite the many resemblances between Videssos and Constantinople and their empires, but the dead giveaway is that Videssos is on a waterway called "the Cattle Crossing," i.e., the Bosporus. There are also warlike nomads to the North, called Kubratoi (for which, I'd guess read Huns) and Halogai (read Celts), blond barbarians hired by the Videssans whose mercenary presence is enough to make or break Avtokrators (Emperors).

Krispos Rising, stand warned, is Book 1 of "The Tale of Krispos" and it chronicles the rise of an appealing young man named (surprise!) Krispos from peasant to Emperor, a phenomenon with some precedents, I believe, in history.

As a child, Krispos and his peasant family are kidnaped by the Kubratoi, who need peasants to produce agriculture for their nomad culture; they are eventually ransomed back by the Empire. In the formal ceremony acknowledging this exchange of "gifts," the boy Krispos is by chance chosen to symbolize the peasants, and is casually given the gold coin symbolizing the ransom. This turns out to be portentous, indeed, as several significant-to-be characters note at the time; the boy has been given the people of the Empire.

As a young man, Krispos is driven off his land by the high taxes laid on by the new young Emperor, and goes to the city of Videssos. He spends his first night at a hostel run by the Church, and the head priest is ordered in a dream to find him and treat him as a son. From there, his rise to power is indeed Byzantine (as in devious and labyrinthine) and enjoyable. My problem is that the fantasy content is minimal. There's a little hanky-panky by a Kubratoi magician as Krispos is nearly beaten in a wres-

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tling match. There's a jokey throw-away reference to the fact that the Emperor gets oranges out of season that are preserved by magic. And the final duel between Krispos and the Emperor is fought with magic on the Emperor's side (studying sorcery has been the only thing he has applied himself to, besides some rather inventive revels). But my purely objective reservation is that while there may not be enough fantasy for the fantasy aficionado, what fantasy there is will put off the historical-novel buff. But, again, *I* had a good time, and look forward to seeing how Krispos makes out as Avtokrator.

Bell-Ringer

Nicoji
By M. Shayne Bell
Baen, $3.95 (paper)

You become aware of at least two unusual aspects of the novel as you get deeper into *Nicoji* by M. Shayne Bell (sounds like a Brontë pen name, doesn't it?). One is that this is a personal odyssey, the adventures of one human on a mostly unexplored planet. Well, it's really *two* humans, Jake the narrator and his partner Sam, but Sam is badly injured almost immediately and the saga becomes that of Jake trying to get himself *and* Sam to safety. They have signed on from Earth to harvest *nicoji,* a lobster-like creature whose flesh seems to be worth about a hundred times its weight in Beluga caviar to the gourmets of Earth, on a planet that has only been opened up for about eight years. However, it's turned out to be a classic "company store" deal, where the corporation for which they work charges so much for necessities that the workers slip further and further into debt. They have come here to escape an Earth where the workers are in literal peonage to the great corporations (Hitachi, Westinghouse, etc.) through the use of work contracts and other such devices of legalized serfdom. (Bell draws an expert portrait of this future society in a brief flashback.)

Jake and Sam have been seduced by the recruitment advertising of American Nicoji, but find themselves in a situation worse than that of Earth, on a mainly unexplored planet. When they hear that a Brazilian rival to American Nicoji has opened a company town some distance away, they determine to make for it in hopes of selling their contracts. The novel is the simple story of Jake's slog through the swamps and lakes of the nameless planet with the injured Sam. I noted a few issues back that most science fiction must be cosmic in theme (world-, universe-, or culture-saving), but here is a novel that proceeds to concentrate on one man and his horrendous personal odyssey.

The other unusual aspect of the novel is that it is acceptably unpleasant. This nameless planet has lots of horrors up its sleeve; not big obvious things like rampaging dinosaurs but nasty *little* things like spider-like creatures that anesthetize your eyeballs while you sleep and then eat them, or harmless froth on a lake that shreds the skin. At one early point in *Nicoji* I almost put the book down for good because of a particularly repellent development, having sworn off books (and movies) whose main

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aim is to ruin my digestion, but I had the good sense to keep going. None of Bell's horrors are gratuitous; there's a realism there that reminds me of the best of the *verismo* books of nineteenth century exploration (I'd just finished the novel about Stanley's last expedition, *The Last Hero,* and was equally repelled but impressed by the unglamorous horrors of unexplored Africa and the trials of the men who explored it). And as it turns out, the nicoji planet's horrors are a sum larger than their parts, being two ecosystems battling to control the same biosphere.

There's yet another aspect of the novel that deserves praise. It's the invention of a native race of the planet, always simply referred to as "the help." They're small, rather simian in appearance, and have attached themselves to the humans, trading basic manual labor for the nicoji parts discarded in processing. They are *not* cute; no Little Fuzzies these. They are capricious, mean, and often bad-tempered or unreliable. Bell has done a masterly job of creating a race somewhere between the animal and the human and one finds one's sentiments toward them veering wildly through the novel. Somewhere out in the corporate universe, some legal argument is being made as to their status as a sentient race, but it will be years before the matter is decided.

Nicoji is a relatively short novel; it is also a first novel. And it is also a knockout, well-written, involving, taut, exciting. And, I must add, touching. I deliberately misled you, gentle reader, above, and pondered long before I decided to reveal one more aspect of *Nicoji.* As it happens, Jake's painful odyssey does affect the entire planet eventually, as one learns in a curiously moving epilogue. Beyond that, I'll say no more except that M. Shayne Bell is an author to keep an eye on; I certainly will.

Atlantean Fulfillment

Letters from Atlantis
By Robert Silverberg
Atheneum, $14.95

There are some science-fiction/fantasy visions that we romantics in the field will never give up, especially we (how I hate to say it) older romantics who were weaned on certain concepts. For instance, a bunch of extremely ordinary looking rocks will never take the place of Dejah Thoris, Tars Tarkis, and the twin towers of Helium as to what *should* be on the surface of Mars.

Another dearly held vision is that of Atlantis: golden-domed, ivory-pillared, marble-halled, etc., etc., etc. Haven't heard much from Atlantis lately. The idea of a long-gone advanced culture of which no trace remains seems as likely these days as Dejah Thoris on Barsoom.

So maybe that's why I was so taken with Robert Silverberg's *Letters from Atlantis.* Here we get an Atlantis the way Atlantis *should* be, golden-domed, etc. It's quite a vision he raises of the chief city of the Atlantean empire.

The novel is given a slight science fictional rationale—the "letters" are written by Roy Colton, a time traveling researcher from the twenty-first century. Time traveling is accomplished by mind only, occupying the body of an inhabit-

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ant of the time you're researching; Colton is "occupying" the body of an Atlantean Prince at the heart of Empire. A colleague is at the other end of the Empire (contemporary Poland, among the primitive "dirt people"—our cave man ancestors), and Roy, who can exercise a certain amount of control over the Prince, contrives to send her letters by diplomatic pouch describing what he discovers. We find the answers to such mysteries as how the Atlanteans have electricity in the Upper Paleolithic Era when the Cro-Magnon was practically a newcomer, and why there are no Atlantean artifacts left. We also share Roy's discomfort at being a sort of spy in someone else's life, and his breaking of the prime rule of nonrevelation to his "host."

This is obviously not one of Silverberg's big novels (I could use the dreaded term YA, but it's a meaningless one); it's short, has a neat basic idea, is full of good details, and above all, gives us Atlantis lovers the grandeur and glory that *was* Atlantis. (It's also nicely illustrated by Robert Gould.)

Antipodean Promise

The Fortress of Eternity

By Andrew Whitmore

Avon, $3.50 (paper)

So we have in the rotting and decadent city of Julkrease, Isaf, a mighty barbarian (from the South, for a change) with oversized thews—or is it thighs—well, you get the picture. And he's down to his last shekel (or whatever), and a withered beggar woman tells his cards and blenches at the last few, and then he goes into a tavern, taking up with a young whore with dreams and a heart of gold. Isaf is there hired by Trevayne, a dashing soldier of fortune, for a quest because of the intricately wrought sword the barbarian is carrying, which he acquired more or less by accident. The quest is to collect the ruler of Hiern Holding in the Redflas Mountains, rendezvous with Trevayne (who has in the meantime resuscitated a long defunct demi-god) in another city, and go off to kill another Deity. Cayla, the whore, decides to go, too.

So what else is new?

As a matter of fact, Andrew Whitmore's *The Fortress of Eternity* has quite a bit that is. Despite a mundane beginning, the story takes some original turns, though rather oblique ones. On page 168, Cayla mutters, "No one seems to know much about anything," and the reader is forced to agree. In fact, after the climax and the death of the God (two pages from the end), Isaf is able to "recall the basic sequence of events clearly enough but was unable to place them in any logical context." Again, the reader has a certain empathy.

Nonetheless, Whitmore (an Australian writer) keeps the narrative going and the surprises coming, and the novel has more than its share of originality and, at times, moments of truly magical high fantasy (hard to come by these days). He also writes very well indeed; dialogue, action and character are smooth, and every once in a while, one runs into a sentence that gives real pleasure: "Grudgingly, the landscape receded to allow him passage" (of a difficult phase of the journey). Perhaps the author just tried to cram too much good stuff

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into too small a novel; the breadth of his concepts exceeded the length of his vehicle.

Shoptalk

Anthologies, etc. . . . Volume 2 of the five-volume *Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick* has been released in paper (Citadel, $12.95, paper) . . . *Catfantastic II* is a second anthology of stories about cats and magic, a pair that goes together undeniably. It's edited by Andre Norton and Martin H. Greenberg (DAW, $3.95, paper) . . . And Marion Zimmer Bradley presents another collection, the seventh, in fact, to prove that sorceresses are as good as sorcerers any day. It's *Sword and Sorceress VII* (DAW, $4.50, paper).

Sequels, prequels, series and whatnot . . . Divergence is Book Two of Charles Sheffield's "The Heritage Universe," the first of which, *Summertide,* was of more than usual interest (Del Rey, $16.95) . . . Michael Moorcock's Elric was the first of the sophisticated fantasy anti-heroes, in one way carrying on the Howard/Conan tradition, but with a wealth of imagination more subtle than Howard ever managed. There is, after many a year, a new Elric book, *The Fortress of the Pearl;* the Dawn Wilson cover for the paperback is a real knockout (Ace, $4.50, paper).

Reprints etc. . . . Edgar Pangborn is one of the just-post-mid-century writers in real danger of being forgotten and it's an authentic pleasure to see his *Davy* back in print. It's a non-technological future novel of great warmth and humanism (Collier, $4.95, paper) . . . On the other hand, Robert A. Heinlein will probably not sink into oblivion any too soon. His most famous novel, *Stranger in a Strange Land,* has just been published in a new edition that includes fifty thousand words from the original uncut manuscript. I like a lot of Heinlein a lot, but that does not include this particular novel, so I'm not about to reread it with an extra fifty thousand words thrown in and pass judgment on the perspicacity of this venture. However, I think it does legitimately raise questions that can be put without reading the "new" version. Many of you readers out there don't really know, I bet, what an editor does. One of the things an editor does is to take a novel, take an objective look at it, and decide whether the author hasn't told us enough, in which case it probably doesn't make sense, or has told us too much, in which case it's boring. Good editors are the ones that are right in both cases. In the latter case, the author is advised to cut, usually to his/her dismay and (if it's a good editor), the book's advantage. Now the intro to the expanded *Stranger* isn't all that explicit as to why the major editing was done originally (". . . a book too far off the beaten track . . . in order to minimize possible losses, Robert was asked to cut . . ." is as specific as it gets), and it emphasizes that Heinlein's widow (who wrote the intro) was instrumental in getting the restored version reprinted and feels the editing was a mistake. I'll leave it up to the novel's aficionados to decide whether restoring the edited material improves it (Ace/Putnam $24.95) . . . Algis

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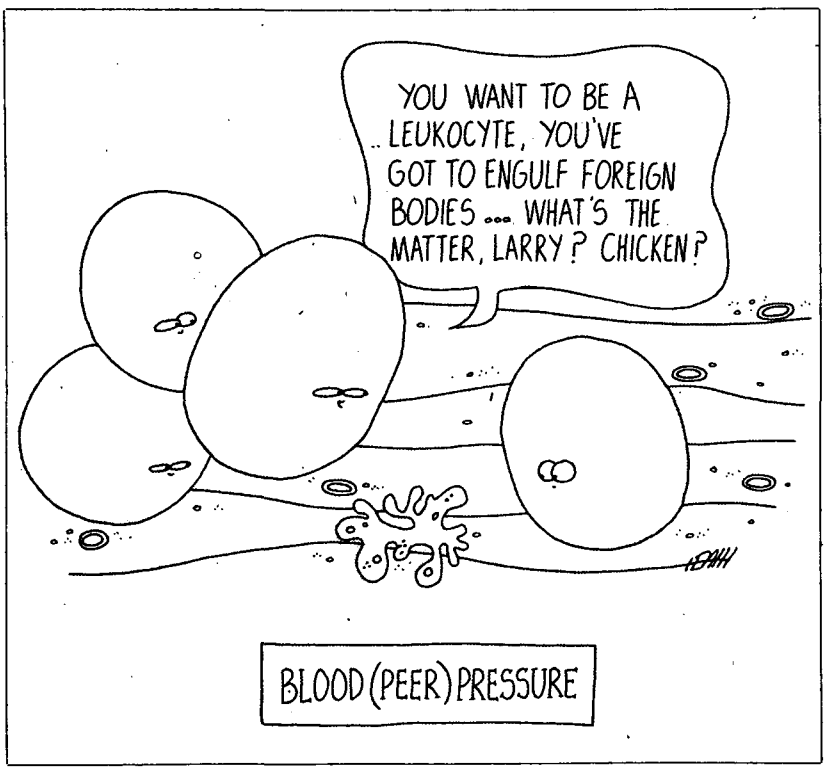
Budrys' *Falling Torch* was first published back in the rough and tumble days when some few of the few houses publishing SF were less than sensitive to the material and/or the authors they published, and so it first appeared in print in a draft form that was rough and incomplete. It's now been reprinted polished as the author intended (Baen, $3.95, paper).

Recent publications from those associated with this magazine include: *The Mammoth Book of Vintage Science Fiction: Short Novels of the 1950s* edited by Isaac Asimov, Charles G. Waugh and Martin H. Greenberg (Carroll & Graf, $8.95, paper) . . . *Science Fiction in the Real World* by Norman Spinrad (Southern Illinois University Press, P. O. Box 3697, Carbondale, IL 62902-3697, $14.95, paper).

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, 1499 Boul. de Maisonneuve Est, Montreal, PQ, H2L 2B2, CANADA. ●



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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

July 4th weekend seems to be popular with cons outside the U. S., for some reason. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, artists, and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 [business] envelope) at Box 3343, Fairfax VA 22038. The hot line is (703) 2SF-DAYS. If a machine answers (with a list of the weekend's cons), leave a message and I'll call back on my nickel. When writing cons, enclose an SASE (say what it's for). When calling cons, say why you're calling right off. Look for me at cons with the Filthy Pierre badge, and musical keyboard.

JUNE 1991

7-9—**DeepSouthCon.** *For info, write:* **Box 23592, Knoxville TN 37933.** *Or call* **(615) 579-3702.** (10 AM to 10 PM, not collect). Con will be held in: Knoxville TN (if city omitted, same as in address). Guests include: C. L. Grant, M. Lackey, D. Chaffee, L. Dixon, K. Moore, A. Offutt. Downtown Hilton.

7-9—**ConText. (403) 424-7764.** Lister Hall, U. of AB, Edmonton AB. Robinsons, Freas, Wm. Gibson.

14-16—**ConCerto.** Cherry Hill (NJ) Inn. SF folksinging. Following up 1990's successful debut.

21-23—**SF & Fantasy Festival, Box 791089, New Orleans LA 70179. (504) 835-4314.** Frederik Pohl.

21-23—**Ozmopolitan, Box 95, Kinderhook IL 62345.** Big meet of fans of L. Frank Baum's "Oz" books.

21-23—**4th St. Fantasy Con, 4242 Minnehaha Ave. S., Minneapolis MN 55406.** D. W. Jones, Doherty.

21-23—**Protoplasm, 1 Shoesmith Ct., Merchant's Place, Reading Berks. RG1 1GT, UK.** Expecting 500.

28-30—**MidWestCon, 6828 Alpine Ave. #4, Cincinnati OH 45236. (513) 984-1447, 631-2543.** THE relaxacon.

28-30—**PhringeCon, Box 11743, Phoenix AZ 85061.** Media oriented but run by traditional fan group.

JULY 1990

4-7—**WesterCon, Box 48478, Bentall Stn., Vancouver BC V7X 1A2.** The big annual Western convention.

5-7—**Ad Astra, Box 7276 Stn. A, Toronto ON M5W 1X9.** Hambly, Effinger, Eggleton, Kay, R. M. Allen.

5-7—**Congregate, c/o Ayres, 118 Cobden Ave., Peterborough England.** Moat House Hotel. Theme: Heroes.

5-7—**CastleCon, 1607 Thomas Rd., Ft. Washington MD 20744. (301) 292-4231.** Arlington VA (near DC).

12-14—**ReaderCon, Box 6138, Boston MA 02209. (617) 576-0415.** T. M. Disch. For the written word.

12-14—**Il-Khan, 2926 Valerie Circle, Colorado Springs CO 80917. (719) 597-5259.** G. R. Dickson.

12-14—**LibertyCon, Box 695, Hixson TN 37343. (615) 842-4363.** Hogan, the deCamps, Cherry, Tucker.

AUGUST 1991

29-Sep. 2—**ChiCon V, Box A3120, Chicago IL 60690.** WorldCon. Clement, Powers. $125 to 7/15/91.

SEPTEMBER 1992

3-7—**MagiCon, Box 621992, Orlando FL 32862. (407) 859-8421.** The '92 World SF Con. $85 to 9/30/91.

SEPTEMBER 1993

3-6—**ConFrancisco, Box 22097, San Francisco CA 94122. (916) 349-1670.** WorldCon 1993. $70 in 1991.

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ASI 7/91

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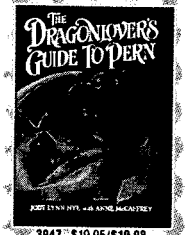

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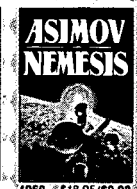

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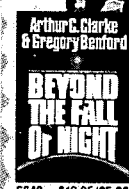

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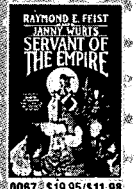

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